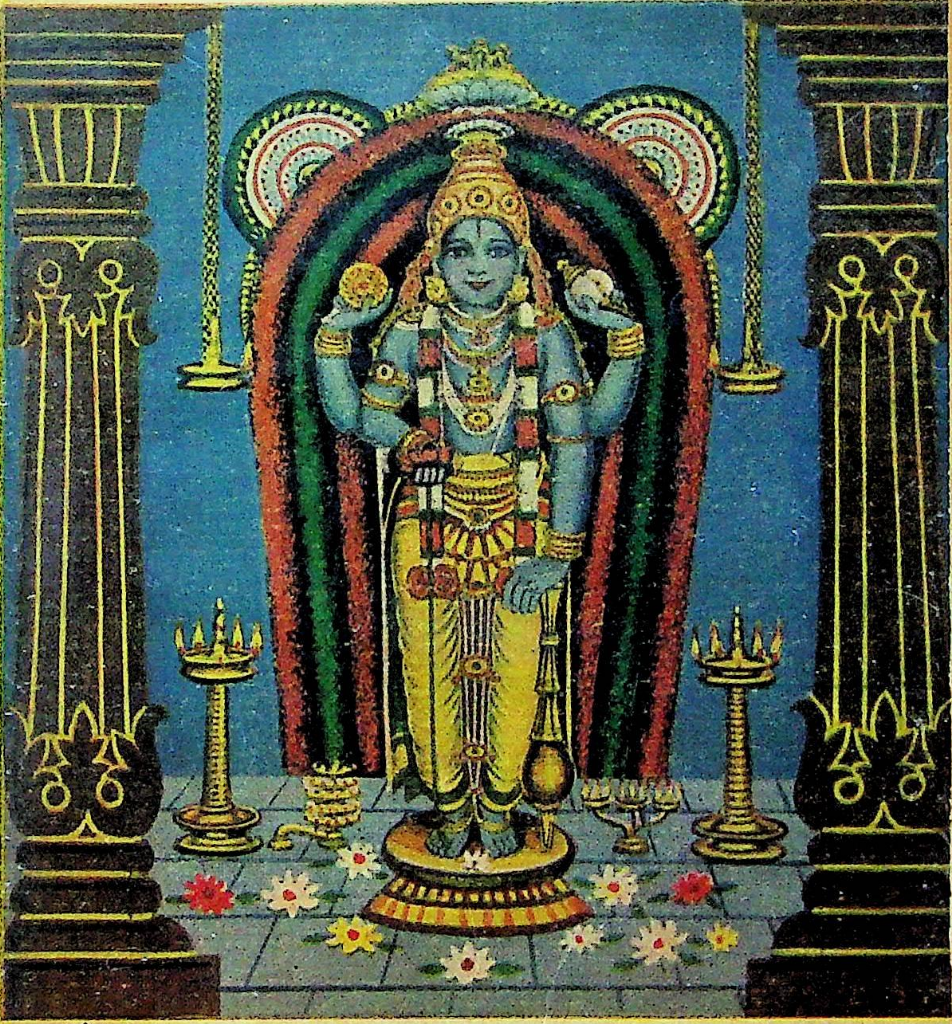
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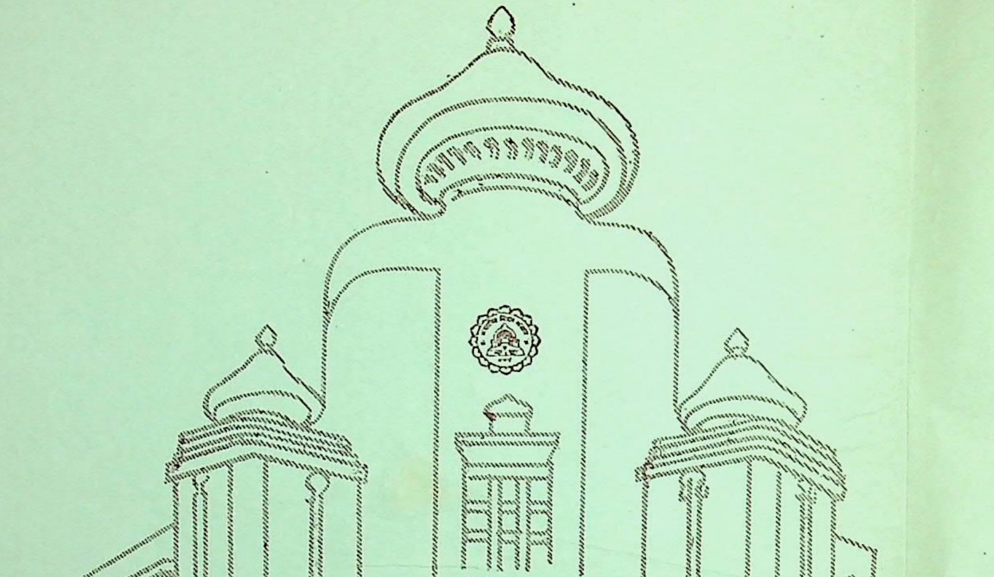
# SRI KRISHNA

## THE LORD OF GURUVAYUR

K. R. VAIDYANATHAN



BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY-7



# What Bharatiya Vidya Stands for

Bharatiya Shiksha must ensure that no promising young Indian of oharacter having faith in Bharat and her culture Bharatiya Vidya should be left without modern oducational equipment by reason merely of want of funds.

2, Bharatiya Shiksha must be formative more than informative, and cannot have for its end mere acquisition of knowledge. Its legitimate sphere is not only to develop natural talents but so to shape thein as to enable them to absorb and express the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya.

3. Bharatiya Shiksha must take into account not only the full growth of a student's personality but the totality of his relations and lead him to the highest self-fulfilment of which he is capable.

4. Bharatiya Shiksha must involve at some stage or other an intensive study of Sanskrit or Sanskritic languages and their literature, without excluding, if so desired, the study of other languages and literature, ancient and modern.

5. The re-integration of Bharatiya Vidya, which is the primary object of Bharatiya Shiksha, can only be attained through a study of forces, movements, motives, ideas, forms and art of creative life-energy through which it has expressed itself in different ages as a single continuous process.

6. Bharatiya Shiksha must stimulate the student's power of expression, both written and oral, at every stage in accordance with the highest ideals attained by the great literary masters in the intellectual and moral spheres.

7. The technique of Bharatiya Shiksha must involve—

(a) the adoption by the teacher of the *Guru* attitude which consists in taking a personal interest in the student; inspiring and encouraging him to achieve distinction in his studies; entering into his life with a view to form ideals and remove psychological obstacles; and creating in him a spirit of consecration; and

(b) the adoption by the student of the *Sishya* attitude by the development of—

(i) respect for the teacher,

(ii) a spirit of inquiry,

(iii) a spirit of service towards the teacher, the institution, Bharat and Bharatiya Vidya.

8. The ultimate aim of Bharatiya Shiksha is to teach the younger generation to appreciate and live up to the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya which is flowing from the supreme art of creative life-energy as represented by Shri Ramachandra, Shri Krishna, Vyasa, Buddha and Mahavira have expressed themselves in modern times in the life of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

9. Bharatiya Shiksha while equipping the student with every kind of scientific and technical training must teach the student, not to sacrifice an ancient form or attitude to an unreasoning passion for change; not to retain a form or attitude which in the light of modern times can be replaced by another form of attitude which is a truer and more effective expression of the spirit of Bharatiya Vidya; and to capture the spirit afresh for each generation to present it to the world.

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

*Let noble thoughts come to us from every side*

—Rigveda, 1-89-i

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*General Editors*

R. R. DIWAKAR

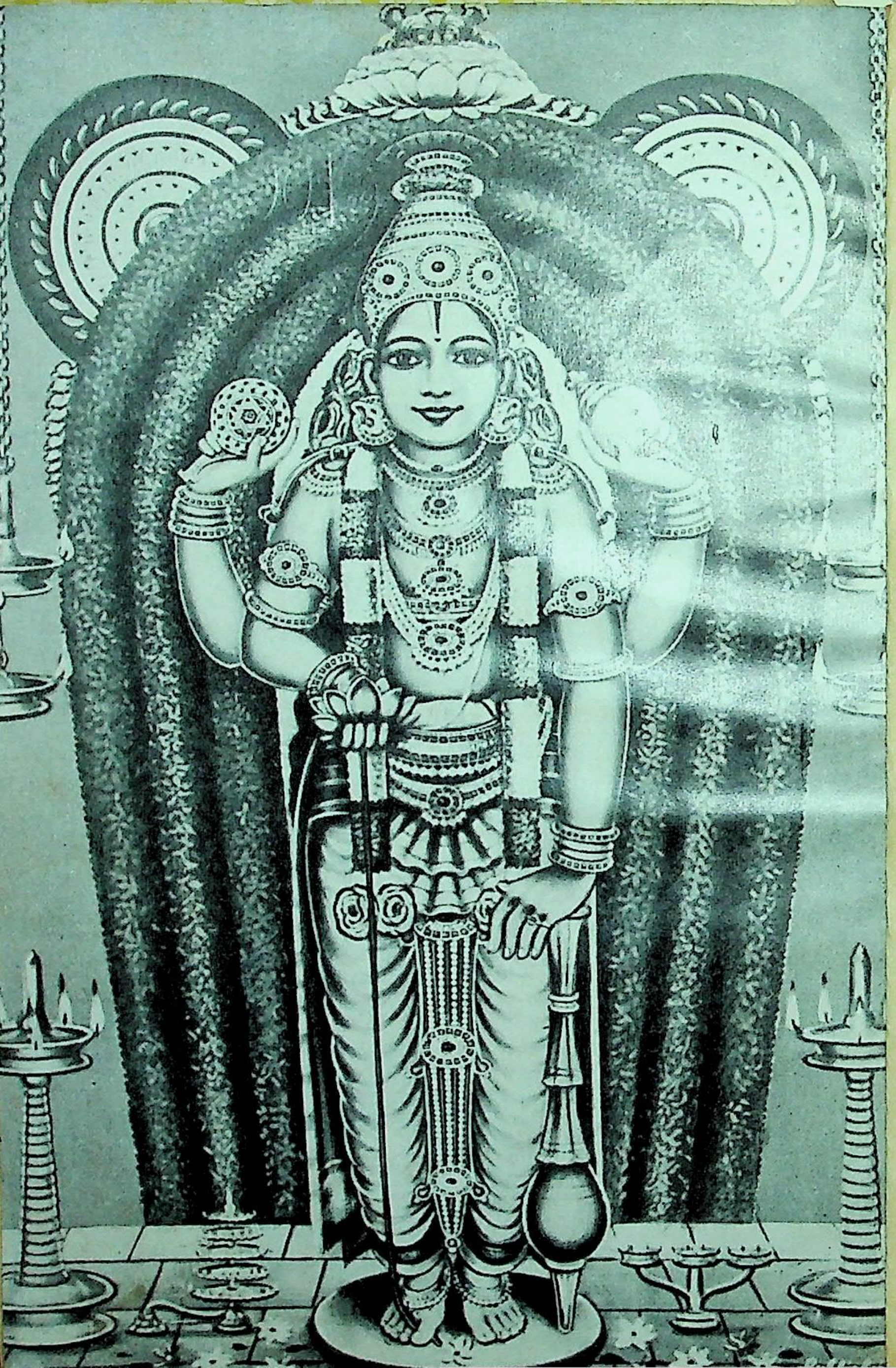
S. RAMAKRISHNAN

195


# SRI KRISHNA
## THE LORD OF GURUVAYUR

By

K. R. VAIDYANATHAN



BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

# SRI KRISHNA

## THE LORD OF GURUVAYUR

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K. R. VAIDYANATHAN

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# KULAPATI'S PREFACE

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulsions of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the re-integration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata,* summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita* by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Maha-*

*bharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere." After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

1, QUEEN VICTORIA ROAD,
NEW DELHI:
*3rd October, 1951.*

K. M. MUNSHI

DEDICATED

TO

MY REVERED PARENTS



*His Holiness Jagadguru Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham.*

HIS HOLINESS
SRI KANCHI KAMAKOTI PEETADHIPATHI

## JAGADGURU SRI SANKARACHARYA SWAMI MUTT

KANCHEEPURAM.

Camp Kancheepuram. 2 Date 21.1.1973.

His Holiness appreciates the attempt of Sri K. R. Vaidyanathan to give a full account of the Lord of Guruvayur in his book to enable the reader to fully understand the greatness of the Lord.

His Holiness hopes that the book will be read by a large section of humanity and that they will endear themselves to "Sri Krishna - The Lord of Guruvayur."

By order
A. S. Bhanu Panth
(A. S. BHANU PANTH)
Manager.

# AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The purpose of temple-going and making votive offerings to deities is not merely to find an answer to the problems of day-to-day life. It has the higher aim of instilling in man devotional love for the Lord; this is *bhakti*, acclaimed by the wise as the easiest path to realise God in this degenerate age of Kali.

Nowhere else do you see *bhakti* demonstrated more feelingly than at Guruvayur, the abode of Lord Krishna, or Guruvayurappan as the deity is popularly known. Like Tirupati, Guruvayur is fast developing into a pilgrim centre of all-India fame. No comprehensive account of the temple is available in English at present, particularly for the benefit of devotees from outside Kerala. An attempt has been made in this book to fill this gap.

I have collected and collated material from a number of sources. These have been acknowledged at appropriate places by way of foot-notes. Special mention must, however, be made of some: (i) the articles entitled "The Glory of Guruvayur" by Shri K. V. Krishna Ayyar, M.A., which were serialised in the August, September and October 1964

issues of the *Kalyana Kalpataru;* (ii) *Sri Guruvayurappan,* a monthly magazine published by Sree Guruvayurappan Sankeertana Trust, Guruvayur; (iii) Publications of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, the fountain head of ethical and spiritual values; (iv) *Narayaniyam* (The Gospel of Guruvayur) of poet-saint Meppattur Narayana Bhattatiri with an English commentary by P. N. Menon, B.A., B.L., published by the Educational Supply Depot, Palghat, Kerala (this is a lucid commentary which no serious student of *Narayaniyam* can do without); (v) *The Arts and Crafts of Kerala,* Paico Publishing House, Cochin; and (vi) *Temples of South India,* The Publications Division, Government of India. I am grateful to the authors/editors of these publications.

I have also consulted freely with that great savant and devotee of Guruvayurappan, Brahmashri Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri and Shri K. K. Menon, Special Officer and Secretary, Guruvayur Temple Renovation Committee. I owe a debt of gratitude to them.

R. G. K. of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* guided me throughout and offered valuable suggestions by going through the manuscript critically. I am extremely grateful to him for giving me freely of his time.

My thanks are also due to my friend Shri S. T. Juvekar of Bombay Typewriting Institution, Bombay, who took immense pains in typing the manuscript, to Shri K. Purushothaman Nair, Proprietor of Bhavana Studio, Guruvayur, Shri Ramunni Nair, R. N.'s Art Studio, Calicut, and

Shri K. V. Jose, Thara Studio, Trichur, for the excellent photographs presented to me for use in the book.

I offer my respectful obeisance to Jagadguru Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham who has graciously blessed my humble effort by granting a 'Sri Mukham' (Benedictory message).

Lastly, I am grateful to the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, for undertaking the publication of this work in their Book University series. In particular, special thanks are due to Shri S. Ramakrishnan, Executive Secretary and Head of the Department of Publications, Shri V. A. K. Iyer, Associate Editor of *Bhavan's Journal* and Shri M. K. Rajagopalan, Production Manager, for the encouragement and generous assistance they gave me in the preparation of this book.

Bombay — *K. R. VAIDYANATHAN*

*March 25, 1974*

## CONTENTS


| Chapter | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| | Benedictory Message By Jagadguru Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham | xi |
| | Author's Preface .. .. .. | xiii |
| I | Introduction .. .. .. | 1 |
| II | The Origin .. .. .. | 9 |
| III | The Lord In The Temple And Other Deities | 15 |
| IV | The Temple Architecture .. .. | 28 |
| V | Daily Worship And Offerings .. .. | 46 |
| VI | Festivals .. .. .. | 64 |
| VII | Narayaniyam—The Gospel of Guruvayur .. | 84 |
| VIII | Lilas of Lord Guruvayurappan .. | 92 |
| IX | The Administration Of The Temple .. | 126 |
| X | The Path Of Devotion .. .. .. | 132 |
| | Glossary .. .. .. .. | 149 |

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Frontispiece : Lord Guruvayurappan

*(Facing page xi)*

His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham

*(Between pages 32-33)*

(1) The Guruvayur temple—The Bhooloka Vaikuntha.
Photo: Bhavana Studio

(2) People irrespective of caste and religion tried valiantly to put out the fire which all but destroyed the temple. Photo: Thara Studio, Trichur

(3) To hundreds of thousands of devotees, Guruvayurappan or the Lord of Guruvayur, is a living deity who answers their prayers.
Photo: *Courtesy*: The Illustrated Weekly of India

(4) His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi of Kanchi arriving at Guruvayur to lay the

foundation stone for the renovation of the temple.
Photo: Bhavana Studio

(5) His Holiness laying the foundation stone on May 1, 1971. The occasion was a big event witnessed by hundreds of thousands of devotees.
Photo: Bhavana Studio

(6) The two-storeyed Gopuram which surmounts the eastern gateway and the lofty Dhwajasthamba (flag-staff). Photo: Author

(7) The eastern gateway which is the main entrance to the temple. Photo: Author

(8) The Anantasayanam (the Lord reclining on the serpent) engraved in stone has replaced the old painting on the western side of *nalambalam*.
Photo: Bhavana Studio

*(Between pages 80-81)*

(9) Rudratirtha—the temple tank.
Photo: Bhavana Studio

(10) Manjulal—the peepul tree hallowed by the memory of the harijan woman Manjula.
Photo: Author

(11) The Siveli—procession of the deity round the temple —is a feature of the elaborate pooja routine.
Photo: Bhavana Studio

(12) Mass Narayana japa conducted daily at dusk.
Photo: *Courtesy* Sri Guruvayurappan Sankeertana Trust

(13) To Sri Guruvayurappan nothing is more pleasing than the recitation of Bhagavata. Sri Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri, a renowned exponent, conducting a *Saptah Yajna.*

Photo: Bhavana Studio

(14) Annaprasana—the ceremony of feeding the child with rice.

Photo: Bhavana Studio

(15) Tulabharam, a popular offering in which the person who undertakes the vow is weighed against certain articles (plantains in this case) which are given away to the deity.

Photo: Bhavana Studio

(16) Of late more and more marriages are being held in the temple. The groom is seen presenting a sari to the bride.

Photo: Bhavana Studio

*(Facing page 84)*

Meppattur Narayana Bhattatiri, a 16th century savant and poet who composed the immortal *'Narayaniyam'*—the gospel of Guruvayur.

—From a traditional painting

*(Between pages 128-129)*

(17) On the concluding day of the Ekadasi festival (November-December) the Lord comes out of the temple in procession to give darshan to the multitudes.

Photo: Bhavana Studio

(18) The elephants are arranged for the race held on the eve of the annual temple festival (*Utsavam*).

Photo: Bhavana Studio

(19) The elephant race on the inaugural day of *Utsavam*. The tuskers running round the temple before reaching the finishing point—the flag-staff.

Photo: Bhavana Studio

(20) Sahasrakalasam—consecration of a thousand pots of water for abhisheka during *Utsavam*.

Photo: Bhavana Studio

(21) The procession carrying Brahmakalasam (holy water for bathing the deity) during the *Utsavam*.

Photo: Bhavana Studio

(22) *Utsavabali* conducted on the eighth day of *Utsavam* when oblations are made to all the Gods and Goddesses. The officiating priest is Shri Chennas Parameswaran Nambudiripad, Tantri of the temple.

Photo: Bhavana Studio

(23) Divine pageant—The morning elephant procession during the annual festival. With *Chamaras* swinging and *alavattams* held aloft the procession provides a grand sight.

Photo: R. N.'s Art Studio, Calicut

(24) Krishnattam—the dance of Krishna—based on Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* is very popular, witnessed by devotees as an act of piety.

Photo: *Courtesy*: Paico Publishing House, Cochin.

## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Sri Krishna took birth in the city of Mathura, on the banks of Yamuna, probably three thousand years before the birth of Jesus Christ. The purpose of his *avatara* or descent to the earth was to destroy adharma and to reveal to the world the splendour of God. He is called the *Purnavatara* of Vishnu, that is, the full manifestation of the Lord Supreme, as contrasted with the other incarnations who were only partial revelations of the God-head.

Even as a boy, He performed many marvellous deeds that testified to His being God incarnate on earth. The destruction of the demoness Putana, the revelation of His cosmic form, Viswarupa, as He opened His mouth to His fostermother, Yasoda, the lifting up of the mountain Govardhana, the overcoming of Kaliya, the serpent who fouled the waters of Yamuna, the devouring of the forest conflagration and, to crown it all, His amorous dalliance with the Gopis are some of the wondrous acts of His early boyhood—acts that indicated how He combined human and divine traits.

In later years, He proved Himself a dauntless warrior, an unsurpassed statesman and a world teacher. He slew Kamsa and many other wicked demons. As Arjuna's charioteer he took leading part in the great battle of Kurukshetra where He delivered His eternal message of the *Bhagavadgita*. He proved His statesmanship by acting as peace-maker between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, and by founding the city of Dwaraka and being its wise ruler. Lastly, as spiritual guide and preceptor, He taught the supreme truths of Yoga, Bhakti and Jnana to Arjuna and Uddhava and through them to all mankind.

What happened to the Lord when He departed after fulfilling the purpose of His *avatara?* That beauteous form with all the auspicious marks in which He manifested Himself in flesh and blood to the people of His time is preserved for all time in the sanctified idols of our temples. Among the more famous of these shrines is Guruvayur, known as "Bhooloka Vaikuntha", where the Lord reveals Himself to His devotees in the same majestic form in which He welcomes them in Vaikuntha, His celestial abode.

The glory of Guruvayur was revealed by the Sage Dattatreya to King Janamejaya, the son of Parikshit. According to the Sage, the image at Guruvayur was originally worshipped by Brahma. He narrated how it came to be worshipped by the Lord himself at Dwaraka, how it was rescued from the great deluge and finally installed at Guruvayur to protect mankind from the evils of Kaliyuga.*

Bhaktakavi Meppattur Narayana Bhattatiri describes

* The story is narrated in detail in Chapter II.

the greatness of the Lord of Guruvayur in the opening stanza of his immortal work *Narayaniyam* thus :

सान्द्रानन्दावबोधात्मकमनुपमितं कालदेशावधिभ्यां
निर्मुक्तं नित्यमुक्तं निगमशतसहस्रेण निर्भास्यमानम् ।
अस्पष्टं दृष्टमात्रे पुनरुरुपुरुषार्थात्मकं ब्रह्मतत्वं
तत्तावद्भाति साक्षाद् गुरुपवनपुरे हन्त भाग्यं जनानाम् ।।

[Oh! blessed indeed are the citizens of Guruvayur! for there shines before their very eyes that Supreme Brahman, which is the ultimate goal of all human endeavour; which shines through a hundred thousand scriptures and yet remains indistinct; which is ever free; which is devoid of the limits of time and space; which is incomparable; and which is the crystallised essence of Bliss and Knowledge.]

The glory of Guruvayur — the place has also come to be justly known as the Dwaraka of the South, — thus rests on the divinity of the idol installed there which represents the full manifestation of the Lord Mahavishnu as was revealed to Vasudeva and Devaki at the time of Krishnavatara: it is that attractive, world-enchanting form of Sri Krishna endowed with the four lustrous arms carrying the conch shell, the discus, the mace and the lotus. Adorning Himself with the divine *tulsi* garland and pearl necklaces, the Lord here appears in all radiance. His eyes stream forth the milk of compassion and kindness. Indeed among the deities known to answer the prayers of devotees, Guruvayurappan is one that easily comes to mind. His name is thus ever on the lips of devotees who flock to His presence in their lakhs from all over the land throughout the year.

Legend has it that King Janamejaya, who became a victim of acute leprosy, performed austerities at Guruvayur at the instance of sage Dattatreya and was cured. There are many other accounts that testify to the healing power of the deity. Reports are heard, even in these days of scepticism, about cures effected by the grace of Guruvayurappan or favours granted by Him. Saints and savants through the ages, like Adi Sankaracharya in the 8th century down to Sri Narayana Bhattatiri, Sri Poontanam Nambudiri and Bilvamangalam Swamiyar, etc. have added to the sanctity of the spot by offering worship to Sri Guruvayurappan.

The very atmosphere of the temple elevates one's soul. As Kulapati Munshiji recorded the memories of his visit to holy Guruvayur in one of his letters in the *Bhavan's Journal:* "One could hear nothing but the chanting of the name of the Lord from the innermost recesses of the heart of the devotees. As I went round the *prakaras,* I could see no idlers and gossip-mongers. Groups of persons went round the different minor shrines in a business-like manner. A couple of men were reciting the *'Narayaniyam'*. At the portico I could see devotees fulfilling their vows with coconuts, plantains, etc. On one side, young couples were giving their children the first official food—*annaprasana*. At another, several parties were celebrating marriages. Yet, at another, many people, young and old, were lining up for fulfilment of *Thulabharam* vows. What a faith!"

This then is the picture of Guruvayur. In terms of the devotion it evokes and the offerings in cash and kind

it receives, it ranks high among the country's temples*. It may not boast of any architectural grandeur or of great historical importance. But in divinity, sanctity, and in cleanliness, this small unpretentious shrine has hardly any equal.

There is, however, one historical incident connected with the Guruvayur temple. When Tipu Sultan invaded Malabar in 1789, the idol was removed to the Ambalapuzha temple, near Alleppey, which is also dedicated to Sri Krishna. It remained there during the years 1789 to 1792, to commemorate which a miniature shrine of Guruvayurappan is maintained in Ambalapuzha even today.

There is a story that once Tipu Sultan marched on the temple at Guruvayur, intent on plunder and defilement. When he was about to enter the inner precincts of the shrine a voice commanded him to stop. The awe-stricken Sultan obeyed and made enormous donations to the Devaswom for the maintenance of the temple.

---

* Some leading Hindu temples in India according to the report of the Hindu Religious Endowments Commission headed by the late Dr. C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar (1962) are:

| | *Annual income in Rupees* |
|---|---|
| Tirupati Devasthanam, Tirupati ... ... | 9, 18, 44, 300 |
| Nathdwara Temple Group ... ... ... | 16, 11, 445 |
| Krishna Temple, Guruvayur ... .. ... | 8, 87, 045 |
| Jagannath Temple, Puri ... ... ... | 8, 03, 000 |
| Dandayudhapaniswami Devasthanam and Ahobila Varadaraja Temple, Balasamudram, Palni ... | 6, 01, 748 |
| Sansthan of Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi ... ... | 5, 91, 814 |
| Subramanyaswami Temple, Tiruchendur ... | 5, 70, 330 |
| Ranganatha Temple, Srirangam ... ... .. | 5, 39, 033 |
| Meenakshisundareswarar Devasthanam, Madurai .. | 4, 52, 550 |
| Badrinath Temple ... ... ... ... .. | 4, 15, 000 |

Guruvayur hit the headlines in 1931 when a *satyagraha* was launched to secure the entry of untouchables into the temple. It was led by the late Sri Kelappan, a prominent Congress leader of Kerala, better known as the 'Kerala Gandhi', who undertook a fast unto death in front of the eastern gopuram for 12 days. He broke the fast at the intervention of Mahatma Gandhi. During the satyagraha, the temple remained closed for a month without pujas. The temple entry question came up again in 1940 when there was a move for a referendum on the subject. After the introduction of provincial autonomy in 1935, the Congress Government of Madras threw open the temples of the province (Malabar was part of it then); and now the "lowly" and "outcastes" could also have a glimpse of Guruvayurappan. Even earlier, Harijans had the right of entry to this temple during the annual Ekadasi festival in the months of November-December. Now every Hindu can have darshan of the Lord from outside the *garbhagriha*.

Incidentally, unlike some other famous temples of India where devotees are charged a fee for darshan or squeezed by touts, the poorest of the poor can worship at Guruvayur without spending a paisa and without any let or hindrance.

How does one reach Guruvayur? The place is 19 miles from the nearest railway station, Trichur, on the Madras-Cochin Harbour Terminus line of the Southern Railway. The Kerala State Transport and private companies ply buses between the two towns at intervals of about 30 minutes. There are also bus services connecting Guruvayur with all important towns in Kerala. The vehicles terminate in the vicinity of either the eastern or western gate of the temple.

One will have therefore no difficulty in locating the shrine. Even otherwise one always hears the full-throated cries of 'Narayana', 'Guruvayurappa' from the surging mass of devotees—and the visitor becomes one among the eager to step into the temple to have the electrifying vision of the Lord of all Gods who is always ready to come to the succour of His devotees.

All around the temple there are ever so many lodges and hotels where the pilgrims can put up at moderate cost. The Devaswom *Satram* (choultry or dharmasala) is located a few yards from the eastern gate and has different types of accommodation and conveniences for individuals, families and parties to stay. The Assistant Manager attached to the *satram* can be contacted in person or by post for reservations in advance.

Inside the temple, as you enter the eastern gate, are counters where the devotees can pay for the various *vazhivadus* (offerings) and obtain official receipts. A list of offerings one can make and their prices is displayed outside.

Set amid the swaying coconut palms, Guruvayur has a scenic beauty, characteristic of Kerala. The city dweller can combine holiday and devotion here. The place is administered by a township committee. It has basic amenities such as good drinking water, clean roads, sanitation and hospitals. A few days' stay in this holy of holies will prove invigorating both physically and spiritually and help us to forget the cares of the work-a-day world.

On November 30, 1970, a disastrous fire broke out in

the temple. It raged for nearly five hours and destroyed a major portion of the buildings. But, fortunately, the Sri-koil (the sanctum sanctorum), housing the deity of Guru-vayurappan and the subsidiary shrines of Ganapati, Ayya-ppan and the Goddess Devi, as also the flag-staff, remained unaffected. This is indeed the greatest *lila* of Guruvayu-rappan in modern times. There is no doubt, therefore, that in keeping with our age-old tradition this immortal temple will rise up again with added glory and splendour to delight the devout hearts of thousands of worshippers.

Narayana! Narayana! Narayana!

## CHAPTER II

## THE ORIGIN

The origin of the Guruvayur shrine is lost in antiquity. The *Gurupavanapura-Mahatmya* which forms part of the *Narada Purana* alludes briefly to its history and sanctity. The story goes that King Janamejaya, son of Parikshit, wished to avenge his father's death which was brought about by the deadly Takshaka, a Naga Chieftain. He accordingly performed a sarpa yajna (a snake sacrifice) in which thousands of innocent reptiles perished.

As a result of the victims' curse he became afflicted with leprosy. The disease was manifested at the very touch of his bride, Jyotishmati of Avanti, on the very day of their marriage. He obtained no relief from medicines. In despair he was on the point of taking his own life when the sage Dattatreya appeared before him. Moved by the king's sufferings, the sage suggested a remedy: propitiation of the Lord Krishna at Guruvayur. He then revealed to the monarch the glory of that deity.

"The image at Guruvayur," said Dattatreya, "is exactly like Narayana, and Narayana himself was the first to wor-

ship it." At the beginning of the Padma kalpa* He gave it to Brahma and it was by the grace of this deity that he was able to carry out his allotted task of creation.

At the beginning of the Varaha kalpa, Sutapa and Prisni who had no children, prayed to Brahma for the gift of a son. The creator gave them the image and said that their wish would be fulfilled by worshipping it. Pleased with their sincere and deep devotion, Lord Mahavishnu Himself appeared before them. Three times they asked Him for a son and every time He said, "Be it so" and added that He would be born to them as their son at three successive births and they would have the good fortune of worshipping the divine image too during all the three *janmas.*

In due course, Prisni gave birth to a son, who was named 'Prisnigarbha'. In their second life, as Kashyapa and Aditi, the couple worshipped the same image. The Lord incarnated Himsef as Vamana in order to humble the demon king Bali who was a threat to the gods.

Kashyapa and Aditi were born as Vasudeva and Devaki in their third life. They received the image from Dhaumya and through its grace Sri Krishna was born to

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| * Our 1000 four Yugas | = 1 day or kalpa of Brahma. |
| Likewise 1000 four Yugas | = 1 night of Brahma. |
| Our 2000 four Yugas | = 1 day and night of Brahma. |
| 360 days of Brahma | = 1 year of Brahma. |
| 100 years of Brahma | = Brahma's full age and that is the duration of the great deluge too. |

Brahma's age is called Para ( पर ), being the largest ever known. He has now completed one half of that, i.e. one Parardha. He is now in his 51st year. Brahma has thus passed 50 × 360, i.e., 18000 kalpas. The current Kalpa is Sweta Varaha Kalpa.

them. After slaying Kamsa, Krishna moved to Dwaraka where He built a temple in which He installed the image of the Supreme Himself and worshipped it after the death of His parents.

When the time came for His *swargarohanam,* or ascent to Vaikunta, Lord Krishna told His foremost disciple and devotee Uddhava that the purpose of His *avatara* was over and that He would soon depart for Vaikuntha. Uddhava was plunged in grief thinking of the terrible fate that would befall the world in Kaliyuga during His absence. The Lord pacified His bhakta by saying that He would manifest Himself in the idol and shower His blessings on His devotees and ward off the evil effects of Kaliyuga. He asked Uddhava to take good care of the image during the impending submergence of Dwaraka in the sea and install it at a spot equally holy in consultation with Brihaspati (Guru), the preceptor of the Gods.

Accordingly, Brihaspati accompanied by his disciple, Vayu, the God of the Winds, arrived at Dwaraka. Sri Krishna had already departed for Vaikuntha and Varuna, the sea-god, was in occupation of Dwaraka. The image itself was being tossed in the sea by the surging waves. At the suggestion of Guru and Vayu, Varuna withdrew. The Wind God carried the image on his head and both set out in search of a sacred place for its installation.

They wandered through lands in the North like Kuru and Panchala, Kashi, Kosala, Videha and Magadha, Anga and Vanga, and in the South through the kingdom of Andhra and Chola in search of a suitable site. At last, as they were entering Kerala through the Palghat gap, they

were met by Parasurama who had created Kerala and who himself was going to Dwaraka in search of the very image they were bringing!*

We must now digress to explain how Parasurama was on the look-out for the image. Rheumatism was a wide-spread affliction with people in those times. Unable to bear the suffering they journeyed together to Parasurama's *mula-sthana* or headquarters at Trichur and appealed to him to afford them some means of relief. At the same time the sage Narada happened to pass through Trichur. He was deeply moved by the sight of such a vast assembly of rheumatics writhing in pain. He advised Parasurama to bring the image which Sri Krishna had worshipped at Dwaraka and install it in the most sacred spot in Kerala. By worship-ping the image, Narada said, people would be cured of the malady.

Parasurama now led the way for Guru and Vayu and they all came near a beautiful lake full of lotuses. On one side of it there were Siva and Parvati to welcome them. The lake was none other than Rudratirtha where Siva taught the *Rudragita* to Prachetas (see Chapter IV). "This place," said Siva to them, "was marked out long ago for the image of Narayana; I shall most gladly leave the Rudratirtha and live with Parvati at Mammiyur on the opposite bank."

Sprinkling the holy waters of the Rudrakupa (the temple well near the Arddhamandapa or porch in front of the central shrine) on the image and offering worship to it, Siva turned to Guru and Vayu and said, "You two together

* "Glory of Guruvayur", K. V. Krishna Ayyar, M.A., *Kalyana Kalpataru*, August, 1964.

should perform the installation; as you are the founders of this sacred temple, this place shall be known as Guruvayupura". This term from which the present name Guruvayur is derived finds expression in the following sloka:

सुराचार्यं त्वयानेन वायुना च निमित्तत: ।
आरब्धमेतत्क्षेत्रं स्यात् गुरुवायुपुराभिधम् ।।

Blessing them all, Siva left for Mammiyur where even today there is a Siva temple which is nearly a kilometre from the Sri Guruvayur temple.

The deity is endearingly called Guruvayurappan, the Lord (Appan) of Guruvayur.

Guru and Vayu brought Viswakarma, the architect of the gods and built the temple. The image was installed in the solar month of Kumbha (Aquarius). The rites were formally begun on the day of Pushya, the eighth asterism, presided over by Brihaspati himself, and completed on the day of Anuradha, the seventeenth asterism, sacred to Mahavishnu as Mitra.*

Such is the mahatmya of the idol at Guruvayur as narrated by the Sage Atreya. The glory of the image is revealed in the following *verses* wherein is mentioned that the Lord infused His own glory into the image to help His devotees in their devotion, to raise them from the miseries of the iron age, to cure the afflicted of their maladies and bless them with health and prosperity.**

अथ वा नित्यसेवार्थं भक्तानां भगवान् स्वयम् ।
स्वकीये विग्रहेऽधत्त तादृशीं महनीयताम् ।।

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* "Glory of Guruvayur," K. V. Krishna Ayyar, M.A., *Kalyana Kalpataru*, August 1964.

** *Narayaniyam*, with English Commentary, by P. N. Menon, B.A., B.L.

भक्त्या संसेवितं नित्यं भगवद्दिव्यविग्रहम् ।
कलौ नान्या गतिः पुंसां विना यत्प्रतिमार्चनम् ।।

रोगातुरजनाशेषशोकविध्वंसनक्षमम् ।
गच्छ त्वमपि राजेन्द्र पुण्यक्षेत्रं रमापतेः ।।

[To help the devout in their daily worship the Lord infused his own glory into the image. Mankind in this age of Kali has no solace other than doing daily puja to this image. It destroys illness and sorrow. O King of Kings, you too proceed to this sacred temple of Vishnu (Guruvayurappan)].

After hearing the story of Guruvayur in full, Janamejaya, accompanied by the sage Atreya went thither and observed devotion for four months under his direction. Bathing only in the Rudratirtha (temple pond), drinking nothing but the water from the Rudrakupa (temple well) and eating only the meagre food obtained as the Lord's *prasada,* he would be present at all the twelve *darshans* beginning with the *nirmalyam* at 3 A.M. (at this time the Lord is still adorned with flowers and garlands of the previous day) and ending with the *tripukka* (in this rite the incense of *ashtagandha* or eight aromatic substances is burnt before the deity) at night. Every day after his morning darshan he would also go to Mammiyur to bow before Siva.

At last, one night, while asleep Janamejaya felt the Lotus hands of the Lord pass over his body from head to foot. When he opened his eyes he found to his joy and wonder that the racking pains over his body had ceased and that all the festering and disfiguring sores completely healed. He returned to his kingdom with a mind full of devotion to the Lord of Guruvayur to whom no one prays in vain.

CHAPTER III

## THE LORD IN THE TEMPLE AND OTHER DEITIES

The eye-filling figure of Lord Guruvayurappan in the sanctum sanctorum is, as stated earlier, the full manifestation of Lord Mahavishnu as was revealed to Devaki and Vasudeva at the time of Krishnavatara.

The God-head is contemplated in two different ways: as manifested (Personal, Saguna, with attributes); and as unmanifested (Impersonal, Niguna, without attributes). While the unmanifested is incomprehensible to the unenlightened, the manifested is within easy grasp of the ordinary aspirant. Has not the Lord Himself said on Bhakti Yoga in the *Gita?*

क्लेशोऽधिकतरस्तेषां
अव्यक्तासक्तचेतसाम् ।
अव्यक्ता हि गतिर्दुःखं
देहवद्भिरवाप्यते ॥

[Greater is their difficulty whose minds are set on the unmanifested, for the goal of the unmanifested is very hard for the embodied to reach.]

As the embodied thinks of himself with form, he cannot help thinking of his God also as with form. The worship of the Saguna Brahman, a Supreme Being with attributes, is the easier path. On the other hand, he who adores the Nirguna Brahman, the Absolute Reality without attributes, has to be free from body-feeling from the beginning. The attainment of that state is not possible for all. Only the jnani or the realised soul can rise to the level of worshipping the Impersonal Brahman. The easy and natural course for the ordinary aspirant is, therefore, to pay worship to a Supreme Being that has form.

Indeed the Lord manifested Himself in Sattwic forms through His various incarnations. While people in the virtuous eras of the dim past could see His embodied forms in flesh and blood, to later generations, the sanctified idols of these incarnations provide the only glimpse of the Lord. The deity at Guruvayur is one such manifested form—of Sri Krishna at His birth. As Narayana Bhattatiri has sung in his *Narayaniyam*:

अव्यक्तं ते स्वरूपं दुरधिगमतमं तत्तु शुद्धैकसत्वं
व्यक्तंचाप्येतदेव स्फुटममृतरसांभोधिकल्लोलतुल्यम् ।

*Dasaka* 99, *Sloka* 10.

[Thy indistinct or unmanifested form is extremely incomprehensible. But that distinct form that is here manifest (in the idol at Guruvayur) is of the nature of Sattwa, pure, and is like the wave of the ocean of ambrosia.]

Having seen the efficacy of meditating on God with form as a means of ultimate realisation, it would be interesting to acquaint ourselves, though briefly, with some of the principles laid down in making images and with the special characteristics of Vishnu idols in particular. According to the *Silpa Sastra** an image must elevate the devotee to a higher plane of action and meditation. Great attention should be paid to its eyes, eyebrows and forehead. The lips should be slightly parted in a smile and the neck graceful like a conch shell. The arms should be like the trunk of an elephant and the thighs like the stem of a plantain tree. A beautiful belly and beautiful feet are other excellences of the idol.

Of Vishnu images in particular, it is said that they are generally shown in one of the three postures: *Sthanaka* (standing), *Asana* (sitting) and *Sayana* (reclining). They have usually four arms carrying *Sankha* (conch), *Chakra* (discus), *Gada* (mace) and the bow and arrows. Of ornaments, they are shown to carry several, such as *Padma* or the lotus, *Kirita* or the crown, *Makara-kundalas* or crocodile ear rings, *Keyura* or armlets, *Kankanas* or wristlets, *Udarabandhas* or *girdles,* the sacred thread, etc. Then there is the

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* *Sri Venkateswara, The Lord of The Seven Hills, Tirupati,* by P. Sitapati, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, pp. 9-12.

Srivatsa* mark on the right chest, the *Vaijayantimala* (a garland reaching up to the knees) and the *Kaustubha* or gem sacred to Lakshmi, adorning the chest.

We may now attempt a description of the body of the Lord at Guruvayur. Made out of a particular kind of stone called 'Patala Anjanam', it is in the standing pose. Evocative descriptions of the Lord occur in the *Narayaniyam* and one cannot do better than to resort to these, though even the great poet admits that His form is indescribable. A general description of the God Personal, which the author had come to worship at Guruvayur, is quoted below:

सूर्यस्पर्धिकिरीटमूर्ध्वतिलकप्रोद्भासिफालान्तरं
कारुण्याकुलनेत्रमार्द्रहसितोल्लासं सुनासापुटम् ।
गण्डोद्यन्मकराभकुण्डलयुगं कण्ठोज्ज्वलत्कौस्तुभं
त्वद्रूपं वनमाल्यहारपटलश्रीवत्सदीप्रं भजे ।।

*Dasaka* 2, *Sloka* 1.

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* Once the sages living close by the river Saraswati decided to ascertain who among the three deities, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva possessed the sattwic nature to the greatest degree. They entrusted this work to the sage Bhrigu. To test the three gods, he first proceeded to Satyaloka and acted in a manner that offended the God Brahma there. The latter was enraged but soon calmed himself knowing that Bhrigu was a devotee in whom there was the strength of years of austerities. Then he went to Siva and showed disrespect to him. Siva became so angry that he was about to kill him but was held up by Parvati. Lastly, he proceeded to Vaikuntha and found the Lord sleeping on the lap of Lakshmi unaware of the arrival of the sage. Bhrigu struck Him with his foot on His chest. At this, the Lord got up and begged of his forgiveness in joy. Not only that, He wished to have that foot-print on His chest as an ornament for all time. It is this footprint that is known as the mark of Srivatsa. This episode shows that the Lord is ever loving towards His devotees in whichever manner they treat him.

[I worship Thy form — that form with Thy crown (on the head) rivalling the Sun, the middle of Thy forehead refulgent with that sandal mark drawn up. The eyes melting with compassion, Thy face beaming with that sweet smile, Thy nostrils beautiful, Thy cheeks shining with the pair of ear ornaments of the shape of Makara fish, Thy neck radiant with the Kaustubha ornament, and Thy body (chest) charming with the wood-garland, clusters of pearl necklaces and the mark Srivatsa*].

केयूराङ्गदकङ्कणोत्तममहारत्नांगुलीयाङ्कित-
श्रीमद्बाहुचतुष्कसङ्गतगदाशङ्खारिपङ्केरुहाम् ।
कांचित् काञ्चनकांचिलांछितलसत्पीतांबरालम्बिनी-
मालम्बे विमलाम्बुज द्युतिपदां मूर्तिं तवार्तिच्छिदम् ।।

*Dasaka* 2, *Sloka* 2.

[I cling to that indescribable form of Thine—that form that destroys all distress, with those lustrous four arms bedecked with shoulder ornaments, arm bracelets, bangles and rings studded with the best of precious gems, and holding therein the mace**, the conch, the disc and the lotus, that

* The translations of the Slokas quoted in this Chapter are taken from "Narayaniyam" with English commentary by P. N. Menon, B.A., B.L.

** It will be worth while to understand the significance of the different symbols which the Lord carries in His hands. The *Chakra* or discus symbolises the cycle of time (Kala-chakra) whose whirlgig brings in consolations as well as revenges, according to the *Varaha Purana*. It is also described as the Dharma-chakra, maintaining order and law in the universe.

The *Sankha* or Conch is the destroyer of *avidya* (lack of enlightenment) represented by darkness and silence. When Mahavishnu touched Dhruva on his cheek with His conch, He

form wearing the yellow silk garment, and shining with the gold waist-girdle, and with feet of the lustre of charming lotus.]

Then the poet describes the Lord from head to foot in the famous verses beginning with "*Agre pasyami......*" ("Here I see before me......") in the concluding *dasaka*. The detailed description of that divine vision of Sri Krishna as was finally revealed to Narayana Bhattatiri shows how wonderfully the image at Guruvayur conforms to the ideal prescribed in the sastras.

The *slokas* which are quoted below contain a portrayal of the divine form starting from the dazzling halo surrounding the deity:

1. अग्रे पश्यामि तेजो निबिडतरकलायावलीलोभनीयं
   पीयूषाप्लावितोऽहं तदनु तदुदरे दिव्यकशोरवेषम् ।
   तारुण्यारम्भरम्यं परमसुखरसास्वादरोमांचितांगै
   रावीतं नारदाद्यैर्विलसदुपनिषत्सुन्दरीमण्डलैश्च ।।

[Before me I behold a halo of lustre charming like a close-set bouquet of Kalaya flowers, and I am bathed in nectar. Then in its midst do I behold the form of a divine boy, attractive with the (budding) advent of adolescence and surrounded by Narada and others with their limbs cover-

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removed Dhruva's avidya. *Sankha* is also said to represent the Nada-brahma (the apotheosis of sound as the Brahman).

The club in the lower hand (mace) is for setting right the irregularities of the world, i.e., *dushta-nigraha* (destruction of the wicked) and *sishta paripalana* (protection of the righteous).

The lotus is said to represent Mother Earth eternally at work at her wheel of creation. It also denotes the beauty and freshness of the cosmos.

ed with hair standing on end at the taste of the bliss supreme, and by that bevy of charming maidens of the form of shining Upanishads.]

*Note*: Narayana Bhattatiri was given to the meditation of Sri Krishna surrounded by His beloved Gopis. These milkmaids are but the Upanishads personified. Hence the Lord revealed Himself to the poet as surrounded by the Upanishads and the venerable sages.

2. नीलाभं कुञ्चिताग्रं घनममलतरं संयतं चारुभङ्ग्या
रत्नोत्तंसाभिरामं वलयितमुदयच्चन्द्रकैः पिंछजालैः ।
मन्दारस्रङ्निवीतं तव पृथुकबरीभारमालोकयेऽहं
स्निग्धश्वेतोर्ध्वपुण्ड्रामपि च सुललितां फालबालेन्दुवीथीम् ।।

[I behold Thy luxuriant braid of hair, blue in colour, curly at the end, thick and very pure, tied into a charming knot, lovely with the crest ornament of gems, encircled by a cluster of peacock's feathers with lustrous eyes thereon, and adorned with the garland of Mandara flowers, and likewise that forehead of Thine, which is charming like the infant moon with the vertical sandal mark thereon, white and clear.]

3. हृद्यं पूर्णानुकम्पार्णवमृदुलहरीचंचलभ्रूविलासै-
रानीलस्निग्धपक्ष्मावलिपरिलसितं नेत्रयुग्मं विभो ते ।
सान्द्रच्छायं विशालारुणकमलदलाकारमामुग्धतारं
कारुण्यालोकलीलाशिशिरितभुवनं क्षिप्यतां मय्यनाथे ।।

[May thy pair of eyes, O Lord! be cast on me who am helpless—those eyes charming with the lustrous eye brows unsteady like the gentle ripples in the ocean of deep

mercy, brilliant with the rows of hair of the eye-lash deeply blue and soft, of great lustre and of the shape of the wide petal of red lotus, of very lovely pupils and cooling the world with the charming glances of mercy.]

4. उत्तुङ्गोल्लासिनासं हरिमणिमुकुरप्रोल्लसद्गण्डपाली-
व्यालोलत्कर्णपाशाञ्चितमकरमणीकुण्डलद्वंददीप्रम् ।
उन्मीलद्दन्तपङ्क्तिस्फुरदरुणतरच्छायबिम्बाधरान्तः
प्रीतिप्रस्यन्दिमन्दस्मितशिशिरतरं वक्त्रमुद्भासतां मे ।।

[May thy face appear clear to me with that nose prominent and charming, brilliant with that pair of gemset ear-ornaments of the design of Makara fish adorning the lovely ears and shining reflected on the cheeks resplendent like a mirror of blue sapphire, lustrous with those rows of teeth (slightly) visible, and greatly cool with that gentle smile ever flowing with love from within the cherry-like underlip, sparkling red in colour.]

5. बाहुद्वन्द्वेन रत्नोज्ज्वलवलयभृता शोणपाणिप्रवाळे-
नोपात्तां वेणुनाळीं प्रसृतनखमयूखाङ्गुलीसङ्गशाराम् ।
कृत्वा वक्त्रारविन्दे सुमधुरविकसद्रागमुद्भाव्यमानैः
शब्दब्रह्मामृतैस्त्वं शिशिरितभुवनैस्सिञ्च मे कर्णवीथीम् ।।

[Mayst thou bathe the hollow of my ears with that ambrosial music of bliss which reveals the most sweetly rising tunes and cools the world, having that flute placed in thy lotus-like mouth and held by Thy two hands which have bangles dazzling with diamonds and palms red like sprouts which in consequence appear variegated in colour with the contact of fingers overspread with the lustre of the nails.]

*Note:* Here the poet describes the Lord as revealed to him. It is not that familiar figure with the four hands and with the various divine emblems. Instead he sees the endearing form of the Lord as a charming cowherd boy, flute in hand and surrounded by the Gopis. The Lord appears before the devotee in the very form in which He is worshipped.

6. उत्सर्पत्कौस्तुभश्रीततिभिररुणितं कोमलं कण्ठदेशं
वक्षः श्रीवत्सरम्यं तरलतरसमुद्दीप्रहारप्रतानम् ।
नानावर्णप्रसूनावलिकिसलयिनीं वन्यमालां विलोल-
ल्लोलम्बां लम्बमानामुरसि तव तथा भावये रत्नमालाम् ॥

[I meditate upon (perceive) that neck of Thine, charming and red on account of the shooting pencil of rays of Thy Kaustubha ornament, that breast attractive with the mark Sri Vatsa and adorned with clusters of pearl necklaces exceedingly dazzling as they move about, that wood-garland made of tender sprouts and bunches of blossoms of diverse hues and lying pendant on Thy chest with bees flying about, and likewise that necklace of diamonds too thereon.]

7. अङ्गे पंचाङ्गरागैरतिशयविकसत्सौरभाकृष्टलोकं
लीनानेकत्रिलोकीविततिमपि कृशां बिभ्रतम्मध्यवल्लीम् ।
शक्राश्मन्यस्ततप्तोज्ज्वलकनकनिभं पीतचेलं दधानं
ध्यायामो दीप्तरश्मिस्फुटमणिरशनाकिंकिणीमण्डितं त्वाम् ॥

[I meditate upon Thee who hast the world attracted with the fragrance profusely rising on account of the five-fold fragrant unguent in Thy body, who dost possess a middle region (waist) slender though the expanse of three worlds lay merged therein, who dost wear the yellow

silk garment like molten dazzling gold set on a blue sapphire and who art adorned with a jewelled girdle with tinkling bells shining with lustrous rays.]

*Note:* The fivefold ingredients of the fragrant ointment of the Lord are saffron, agallochum, musk, gorochana (a yellow pigment prepared from the urine or bile found in the head of a cow) and red sandal. These are mixed with *sandal* and rose water to form an ointment called *Panchangaraga.*

8. ऊरू चारू तवोरू घनमसृणरुचौ चित्तचोरौ रमाया
विश्वक्षोभं विशङ्क्य ध्रुवमनिशमुभौ पीतचेलावृताङ्गौ ।
आनम्राणां पुरस्तान्यसनधृतसमस्तार्थपाळीसमुद्ग-
च्छायं जानुद्वयञ्च क्रमपृथुलमनोज्ञे च जंघे निषेवे ।।

[I do resort to (meditate upon) Thy two thighs, charmingly developed and of a lustre thick and deep, captivating the mind of the Goddess Lakshmi and always covered with yellow silk garment, verily doubting as it were of a universal agitation being caused (if exposed). I look upto that pair of Thy knees having the lustre of a casket holding all objects of desire placed before Thy devotees, and those two shanks lovely with their gradual development.]

*Note*: The objects of desire of a man's life referred to are the four *purusharthas—Dharma* (virtue or observance of the law), *Artha* (wealth), *Kama* (desire) and *Moksha* (final deliverance).

9. मंजीरं मंजुनादैरिव पदभजनं श्रेय इत्यालपन्तं
पादाग्रं भ्रान्तिमज्जत्प्रणतजनमनोमन्दरोद्धारकूर्मम् ।
उत्तुङ्गाताम्रराजन्नखरहिमकरज्योत्स्नया चाश्रितानां
सन्तापध्वान्तहन्त्रीं ततिमनुकलये मङ्गलामङ्गुलीनाम् ।।

[I meditate upon that anklet of Thine which proclaims, as it were, with its melodious sounds, that the service at thy feet is superior (meritorious), that upper part of thy foot shaped like that of the tortoise that raises up the Mandara mountain in the form of the minds of thy devotees sunk in illusion and that auspicious row of Thy toes which, with the light of the moon on Thy nails, prominent and shining lightly red, dispels the darkness of distress of Thy dependents.]

10. योगीन्द्राणां त्वदङ्गेष्वधिकसुमधुरं मुक्तिभाजां निवासो
भक्तानां कामवर्षद्युतरुकिसलयं नाथ ते पादमूलम् ।
नित्यं चित्तस्थितं मे पवनपुरपते कृष्ण कारुण्यसिन्धो
हृत्वा निश्शेषतापान् प्रदिशतु परमानन्दसन्दोहलक्ष्मीम् ।।

[O Lord! Thou Ocean of mercy! O Krishna! O Lord of Guruvayur! May Thy feet which to the lordly sages are the most charming of all Thy limbs, to the delivered, their (final) abode, and to thy devotees, the tender sprout of that celestial tree which showers on them their desired objects, grant me, seated as they are always in my mind, the prosperity of complete Bliss Supreme, dispelling all my distresses.]

This is the picture conjured up in the Holy of Holies at Guruvayur. While the various *lakshanas* and characteristics referred to earlier in this Chapter are those prescribed for *silpins* while making images for worship by humans, what of the image which was worshipped by the Lord Himself? It is indeed perfection personified, a *divya-mangala swaroopa*. The glory and greatness of the Lord are beyond speech. Let us join the poet in his prayer in the concluding

verse of his monumental work: "May the Lord forgive us our rash venture to describe His glory and bless us with long life, health and happiness."

11. अज्ञात्वा ते महत्त्वं यदिह निगदितं विश्वनाथ क्षमेथाः
स्तोत्रं चैतत्सहस्रोत्तरमधिकतरं त्वत्प्रसादाय भूयात् ।
द्वेधा नारायणीयं श्रुतिषु च जनुषा स्तुत्यतावर्णनेन
स्फीतं लीलावतारैरिदमिह कुरुतामायुरारोग्यसौख्यम् ।।

[Mayst Thou, O Lord of the Universe! forgive me of what has been spoken here by me in ignorance of Thy greatness. May this hymn of praise of more than thousand slokas tend to Thy great favour. May this hymn which is embellished with Thy sportful incarnations and which, on account of its origin in the Vedas and the description of Thy aspect worthy of being praised, is a Narayaniyam in a two-fold way, bring on long life, health and happiness.]

*Other Deities*

It will be seen that the deity of Lord Krishna stands all by itself in the sanctum, unaccompanied by any of his consorts as is the case with some other Vaishnava temples. Other images in the temple are Vinayaka or Vighneswara, Sasta or Ayyappa who is said to be a son of Siva by Mohini (Vishnu in the guise of Temptress) and goddess Durga.

The goddess is called Edattedattu Kavil Bhagavati. Her image was installed originally in the very place where the present Srikoil of Guruvayurappan stands. The Goddess, the story goes, was awaiting the arrival of the Lord's image

from Dwaraka. As she saw Guru and Vayu bringing the image, She welcomed them and requested them to install the Lord in her place, she herself moving a little to the left. Before leaving her original abode she requested the Lord that He give her darshan once a year. Accordingly every year on the 'Aarattu'* day of the *Utsavam,* the Lord visits her shrine and midday puja is conducted here. Only on this occasion is cooked *naivedyam* offered at this shrine, the offering on all the other days being *azhal* (See *Vazhivadus* in chapter V, Daily Worship and Offerings). Since the Goddess moved to the left, Her shrine is called Edattedattu Kavil, which in Malayalam means the shrine located on the left side.

* Aarattu is a bathing festival—See Chapter VI.

## CHAPTER IV

# THE TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

Tradition has it that after the installation of the deity, Guru and Vayu brought Viswakarma, the architect of the gods, and built the temple. The construction is unique in more than one respect and might indeed baffle modern architects. A striking feature is that the deity can be seen from quite a distance from the eastern *nada* (gateway) though it is seemingly hidden by the huge *Dipasthambha, Dwajasthambha* (Flag-staff) and *Belikkallu* (Altar). The first rays of the morning sun can be seen falling on the lotus-feet of the Lord on the summer equinox, as though the Sun-God himself is prostrating himself before the deity. It is also said that in order to carry out future repairs and additions Viswakarma had his measuring rod (which is slightly longer than the conventional one used by the carpenter) engraved in relief on the surface of the northern basement of the Arddhamandapa (porch in front of the central shrine).*

There is another legend which attributes the construc-

* Glory of Guruvayur, K. V. Krishna Ayyar, M.A., *Kalyana Kalpataru,* August 1964.

tion of the temple, probably at a later period, to a Pandya king. This monarch was told on a reading of his horoscope by his astrologer that he was destined to die from a cobra bite. He therefore made up his mind to try whether he could avert his fate. He went on a pilgrimage thinking that if he could not change his destiny he would at least spend his last days in sacred shrines. He thus came to Guruvayur and stayed there praying to the deity with great devotion. He was so engrossed in his worship that he did not realise the passage of time. One day he found to his amazement that the time predicted for his end had gone unnoticed. He returned to his kingdom and asked his court astrologer to explain to him how he outlived his allotted span. The astrologer maintained that he had not gone wrong in his prediction, that the king had in fact been bitten by a cobra as could be seen from the scar left behind on his heel. But by the grace of the deity, before whom he had been meditating, he was saved from death. Looking back, the king recollected that while propitiating the Lord he had been engrossed in a plan to build a new temple for the deity. Overwhelmed by the Lord's grace, he returned to Guruvayur with men and material and had the temple reconstructed.

During the centuries the temple was rebuilt a number of times. The structure which was partly destroyed by fire in November 1970 did not appear to be very old if the available dates of construction are any indication. The western gopuram, for instance, is said to have been built in 922 ME.—Malayalam Era (1747 A.D.) as per the inscription on the granite door post. The Srikoil, Mandapam, etc., were remodelled in 1030 M.E. (1855 A.D.) and the

Kuttambalam and Nalambalam (the structure surrounding the Srikoil), were constructed in 1068 M.E. (1893 A.D.).*

Whatever the period of construction, the features of the sacred and domestic architecture in Kerala have been preserved through the ages. It will be of interest to know the evolution of temple architecture in the South with special reference to the Kerala temples before we take up the description of the Guruvayur shrine proper.

*Evolution of Temple Architecture in the South*

It is well known that South India is dotted with thousands of temples, many of them noted for their antiquity and artistic excellence. This is due to the historic fact that unlike North India, the country south of the Vindhyas had been relatively free from repeated foreign invasions and was therefore able to preserve its religious monuments from wanton destruction or neglect. Further, the life of an average South Indian is dominated by religion. To him a temple is a symbol of 'dharma' and to provide for its construction and maintenance is considered to be an act of merit herein and hereafter.

What is more, as a visible emblem of the religion, philosophy and life of the people, the temple in the South has played a role far more vital than any other institution. The presiding deity has symbolised the Supreme Principle which controls the affairs of the world and gives direction to the spiritual urges of the people. The temple itself has become the centre of all civic and social life. Or, rather, the village or

* *A Pilgrim's Guide to Guruvayur*, C. G. Nair.

town grew around the temple which became the hub of all activities.*

The influence of the temple extended even beyond the religious and spiritual realms; it became an important factor in the economy of the village. There are temples (like Guruvayur) which became leading land-owners, thanks to the munificence of kings, nobles and devotees. While the construction of a shrine, which usually took many years, gave employment to hundreds of artisans, the daily rituals provided for priests, musicians, florists and a host of attendants on a permanent basis.

The temple premises also became the venue for public entertainment. Music and dance recitals held during the festivals have provided entertainment to rich and poor alike. During these festivities people participated in large numbers in the general merriment without any social distinctions. Trade too flourished during such occasions. In short, the temple became the centre of people's lives. The evolution of sacred architecture, therefore, from its simple unostentatious beginnings as a shrine of worship to an agglomeration of structures, some functional and some ornamental, conformed to the increasing emotional and spiritual demands of the devotees.

The temples of South India may be broadly classified into the Chalukyan and Dravidian styles of architecture. The exquisite temples of the Chalukyas are largely confined to the Kannada-speaking areas. The stone-built shrines of

* *Temples of South India,* The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

Aihole and Pattadakkal (in the Bijapur district of Mysore State) are about the earliest (about A.D. 500) of the Chalukyan school whose evolutionary process continued right upto the middle of the 13th century.

The stately and elaborate Dravidian style is mainly confined to the Tamil-speaking districts and parts of Andhra Pradesh. To this belong the well-known temples of Tanjore, Madurai, Srirangam, Chidambaram, Rameswaram, etc. With their many concentric enclosures, imposing towers and ornate "halls of a thousand pillars", they are composite products of a long evolution over a thousand years.

The gabled or multiple-roofed structures of Kerala built of laterite stone, bricks, wood and tiles present a completely different appearance from the other Southern styles. While the far south and south-west of Kerala (especially Travancore) came to some extent under the influence of the Dravidian style, the temples in central and north Kerala have characteristics which are distinctively indigenous.

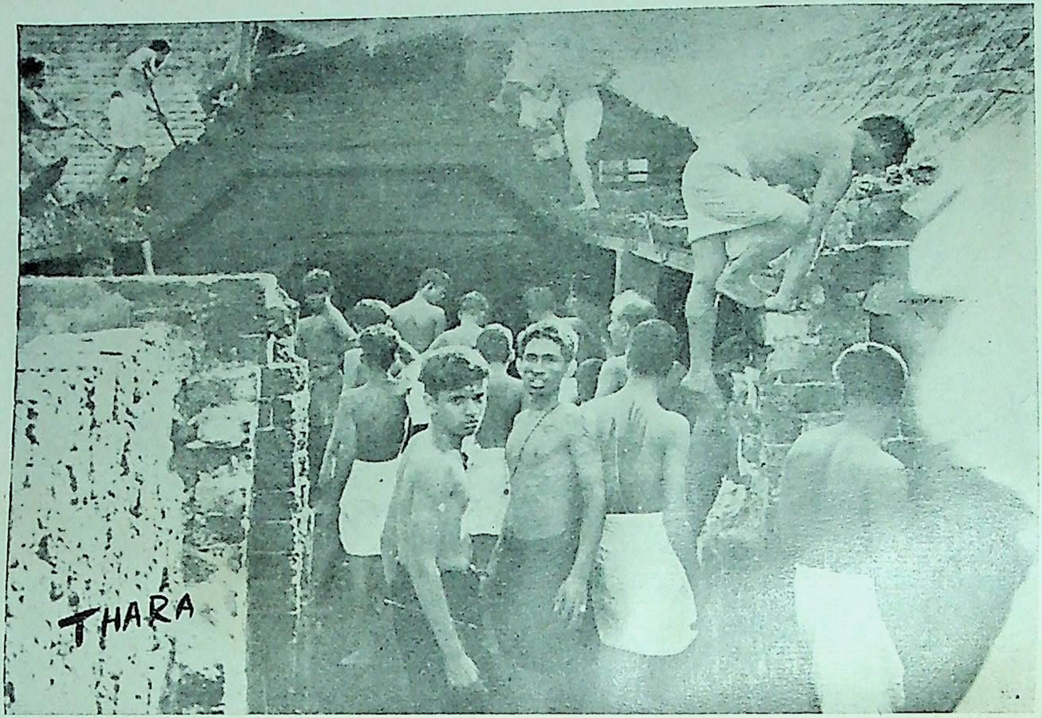
Comparing the temples of Kerala with those belonging to the Dravidian style, Dr. Stella Kramrisch points out: "The temples and other structures with the gable roofs lack both the costliness and grandeur of the Dravidian structures, but they are neat and simple, with provision of admitting plenty of light and fresh air; and in these respects are undoubtedly superior to the costly edifices of the Dravidian style. This indigenous style is peculiar to Kerala and indeed the like of it is not known to exist anywhere else in India. The chief characteristic of this style is that wood enters largely into its construction."*

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* Travancore State Manual, Volume 1, Page 165.



*The Guruvayur Temple—the Bhooloka Vaikuntha.*
*Photo*: Bhavana Studio.

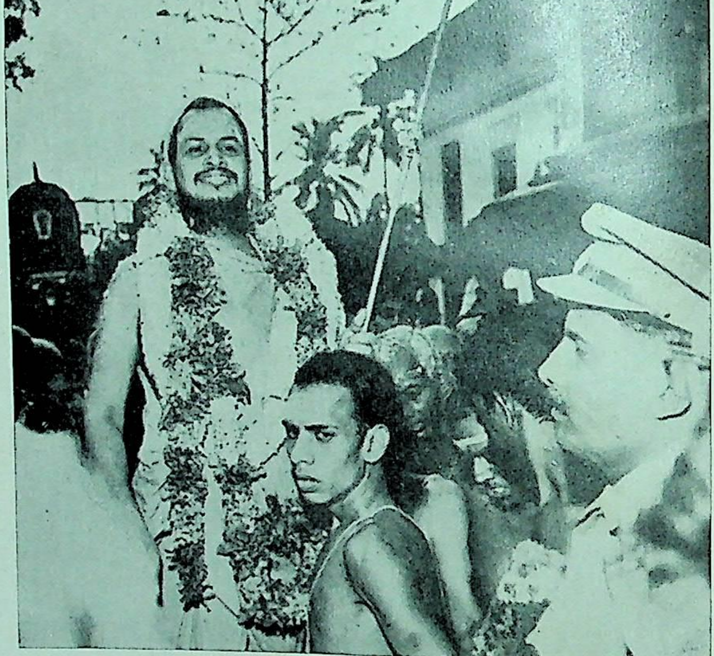



*Hundreds of people irrespective of caste and religion tried valiantly to put out the fire which all but destroyed the temple.*

*Photo*: Thara Studio, Trichur.



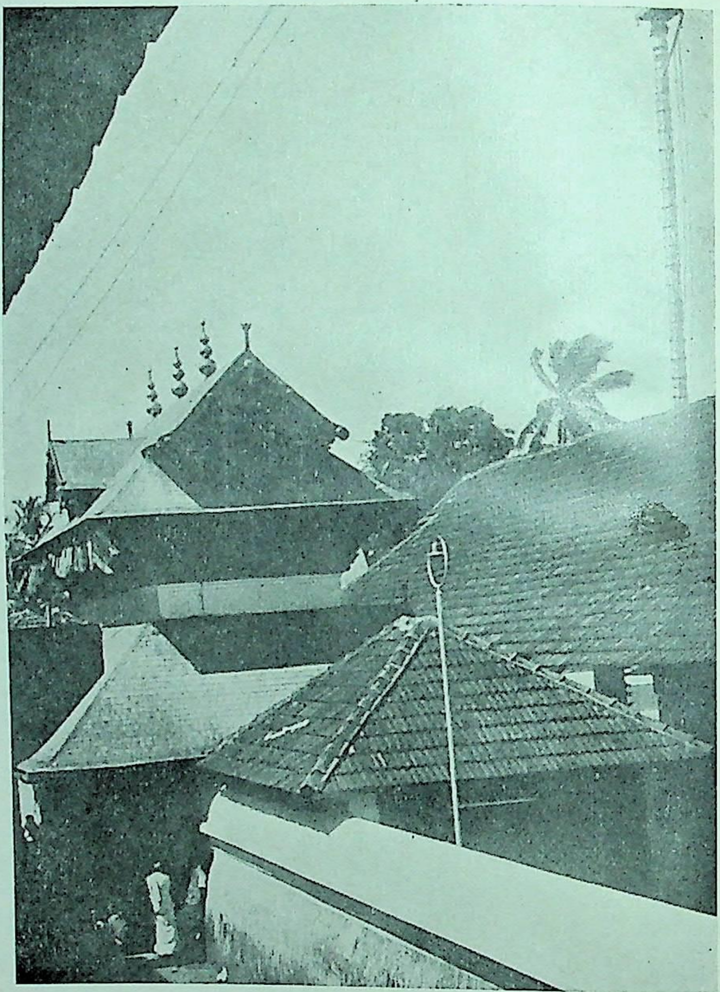
*To hundreds of thousands of devotees, Guruvayurappan or the Lord of Guruvayur, is a living deity who answers their prayers.*
*Photo, Courtesy*: The Illustrated Weekly of India.



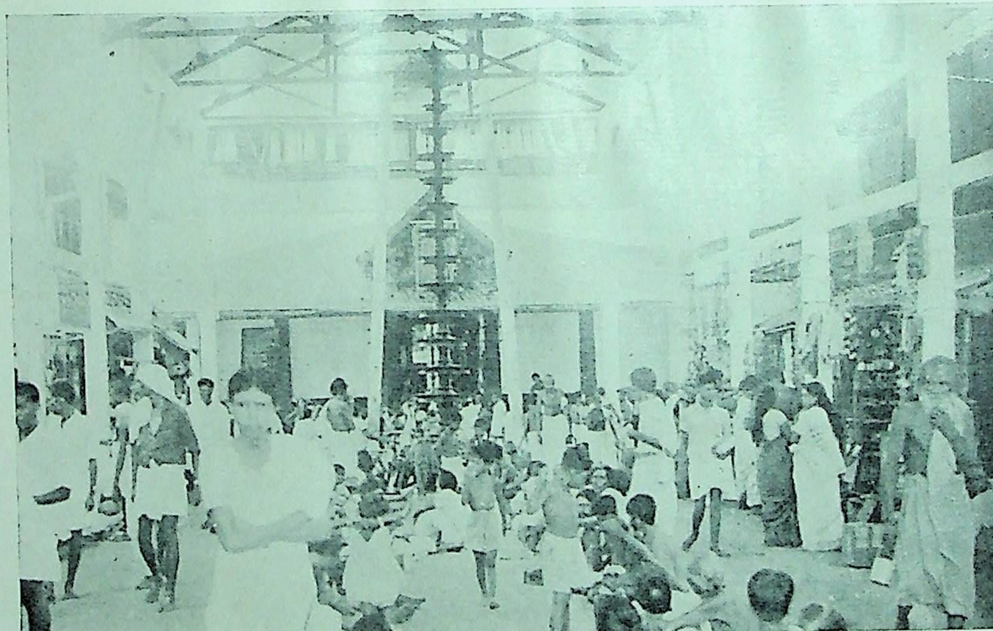
*His Holiness Jagadguru Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi of Kanchi arriving at Guruvayur to lay the foundation stone for the renovation of the temple.*
*Photo*: Bhavana Studio.



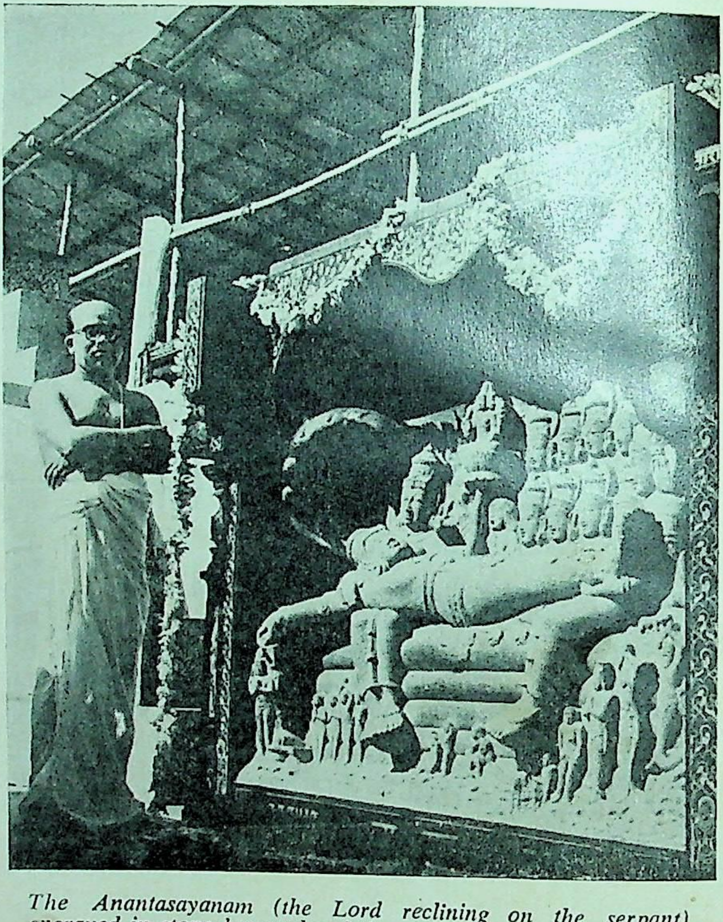
*His Holiness laying the foundation stone on May 1, 1971. The occasion was a big event witnessed by hundreds of thousands of devotees.*
*Photo*: Bhavana Studio.



*The two-storeyed Gopuram which surmounts the eastern gateway and the lofty Dhwajasthamba (flag-staff).*
*Photo*: Author.



*The eastern gateway which is the main entrance to the temple.*
*Photo*: Author.



*The Anantasayanam (the Lord reclining on the serpant) engraved in stone has replaced the old painting on the western side of* nalambalam.

*Photo*: Bhavana Studio.

A unique feature of the temple architecture of Kerala is the roof which is by far the most striking part of the construction. It is a broad-based, steep and pointed superstructure, resembling the thatched roof of huts and houses commonly built in Malabar. Great attention is paid to the construction of these roofs, the length, thickness and the joints of the rafters being regulated by rules laid down by ancient treatises on architecture (*Vastu vidya*).

These roofs can be single or double, but they take the shape of the plan of the structure on which they are superimposed. If the plan is circular, the roof becomes an enormous cone, its open base covering a good part of the perpendicular wall in a broad, sweeping curve. The square temple has its steep pyramidal roof, being in appearance more austere and less impressive than the cone. The third variety is a ridged roof, single or double. The ridge of the roof runs breadthwise and projects beyond the hipped end, terminating in a characteristic triangular gable-end resembling an open attic. The roofs, whether conical, pyramidal or ridged, are often multiple, two or three storeys high and add greatly to the height and majesty of the structures.

It is interesting to note that the ridged roof is not altogether peculiar to Kerala. We find that in the architecture of certain Himalayan regions, more especially in Nepal and Kashmir, gabled or multiple type roofs have prevailed throughout the centuries whether the material was wood or stone. The Kerala type is nearer to that of Nepal although we cannot explain this affinity between the two types in terms of cultural contact between regions which are separated by nearly fifteen hundred miles.

Sri K. V. Soundara Rajan in his book, *Indian Temple Styles* says that the severity of rain in Kerala and of snow in the Himalayan regions must have been contributory factors in the growth of atypical styles in these parts. Thus the wide availability of timber and tile as also the climate explain how the wooden styles in these regions have assumed the gable or the pagoda type. According to him, they have also something in common with Nepal, Burma and China and might have been a borrowal from earlier Buddhistic conventions for a shrine.

Sri Soundara Rajan adds: "There seem to be many links between China and Kerala also attested to by history and probably the intensity of climate gave rise to a community of analogous styles, the raw materials being similar. But it should be noted at the same time that, but for the superficially common roof-type, all other elements of their architecture are indigenous. In Kerala, especially, it can be convincingly demonstrated at successive stages that the careful camouflage of the typical concepts and features of South Indian architecture, if stripped, displays many common structural and architectural idioms of the main land across the ghats.... If an analogy could be culled out from the culture of the region itself, in much the same manner as there is a dichotomy between the almost sparsely clothed habit of the Kerala men and women, and the excessively clothed character of the Kathakali costume, in temple architecture also, they kept the *nali-griha* or the womb-temple plain in the interior but completely smothered it with a timber and copper-sheet exterior venture."*

* *Indian Temple Styles, The Personality of Hindu Architecture* by K.V. Soundara Rajan. Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, Pp. 74-76.

*Features of Kerala Temples*

We now proceed to a more detailed description of temple architecture in Kerala with special reference to Guruvayur.

The component parts of a temple* from the foundations upwards are: (i) the *upapitha* (pedestal), (ii) the *adhisthana* (base), (iii) the *stamba* (pilaster), (iv) the *prastara* (entablature), (v) the *griva* (neck of the dome), (vi) the *sikhara* (cupola) and (vii) the *stupa* (pinnacle). Up to the *prastara,* the structure is the same as that of the Dravidian style. The difference that strikes the eye is, as described earlier, in the upper portion. In the Kerala temples, the wooden roof is covered with copper sheets or tiles, and ornamented with perpendicular or tilted triangular gables. It is the heavy and often incessant rainfall that necessitated these deviations from the Dravidian style in the construction of the roofs, though care has been taken to avoid complete eradication or transmutation of the designs prescribed by the sastras.

Most of the temples in Kerala face east though some are turned west, and a few south. The general features of the temple are the central shrine, called the *Srikoil* which may be square, oblong or circular in shape. It may consist of one or two storeys over which a sloping roof is built. Within it is the *Garbhagriha,* the cell in which the image of the deity is installed. There is a *Namaskara mandapa* in front of the central shrine, square in shape and with a pyramidal roof—this is used by the devotees to prostrate them-

* "Architecture In Kerala", R. V. Poduval. *The Arts And Crafts of Kerala*, PAICO Publishing House, Cochin.

selves before the Lord. Surrounding this is a corridor or pillared hall known as the *Nalambalam* or *Chuttambalam*, the outer portico of which is the *Belikkalpura* containing the *Belikkal* or altar, with a flag-staff or *Dwajasthamba* in front of it. Around the Nalambalam is the Vilakkumatam, a gallery of five to nine rows of lamps fixed over a masonry base or wooden framework.

On the outside of the whole structure there is a paved processional path. Kuttambalam for staging of "Kuttu" and other performances is another structure outside, akin to the Natakasala (Drama Hall) of Dravidian shrines.

The temple well which supplies water for bathing the image and for preparing offerings of food to the deity is situated generally in the north-east corner. The kitchen called "madappalli" is in one portion of the Nalambalam.

Smaller shrines dedicated to Sasta, Parvati, Ganesa or other deities are also found in almost all the temples. A banyan tree with images of Nagas (serpents) around it is another feature. All these are enclosed by a rectangular wall with an entrance often surmounted by gopurams (towers) in the centre of each side. There is also the temple tank as part of the structure which devotees can use and directly enter the temple after a bath.

*The Guruvayur Temple*

The temple at Guruvayur is comparatively small in dimensions, though it has imposing gopurams, one on the east and the other on the west. The temple faces east and is usually entered by the eastern gopuram. Near it is the

Dwajasthambha.* Passing this, one enters the inner precincts through a passage lying between the two "Vathilmatams", raised platforms in the Nalambalam, which are used for feeding Brahmins. Passing the 'Vathilmatams' one reaches the Namaskaramandapam or the Arddhamandapam referred to earlier. Beyond this is the Srikoil or Garbhagriha (sanctum sanctorum).

The Vathilmatams cover the entire eastern side. On the southern side, there are the temple kitchen (Madappalli) where *naivedyams* for the deity are prepared. To the western side of the kitchen is a dark cell closed on all sides. Nobody knows what exactly it contains; hence it is also called 'Mystery Cell.' It is believed that the chamber may contain precious jewels and ornaments deposited there when the deity was removed to Ambalapuzha at the time of invasion by Tipu Sultan, referred to in the 'Introduction'.

Beyond the Mystery Cell on the south-west corner is a small shrine dedicated to Vighneswara or Vinayaka. While in Tamil Nadu there are many independent temples for Vinayaka, in Kerala there are hardly any such though there is no shrine without a niche for Ganapati.

On the northern side too there is a passage to enter the inner temple. Just to the eastern side of this passage is a room called "Nrittam", which literally means dancing. It is so called because it is believed that Bilvamangalam

* Flag-hoisting in temples everywhere heralds the annual *utsava* or festival. The festival lasts 8 to 10 days at the end of which the flag is lowered. On both occasions there are special rites performed by the chief priest. The flag-staff at Guruvayur is nearly 110 feet long and is gold-plated. See chapter on Festivals for detailed description.

Swamiyar, a great devotee of the Lord, used this room for meditation and often danced there in ecstatic devotion.

In front of "Nrittam" and to the north-eastern side of the Srikoil is the temple well. The water which is used for the temple purposes is crystal clear at all seasons and is reputed to possess digestive and curative properties. Indeed many pilgrims forgo their tea or coffee while at Guruvayur to enjoy the rare taste of this water. It is believed that the well is consecrated by the 'Pratishtha' of Varuna.

Coming out of the inner portion of the temple, let us now circumambulate along the courtyard, or 'Matilakam' as it is called, starting again from the Dwajasthamba through the paved processional path around the temple. On either side of the Dwajasthamba are the stately Dipasthambas (pillars of lights). To the south-eastern corner is the 'Kuttambalam' for the performance of 'kuttu' referred to earlier. Discourses on the *Bhagavatapurana* are also held here.

Then to the north-western side of this *kuttambalam* is the little shrine dedicated to Sasta, said to be the son of Hari and Hara, popularly known as Ayyappa. The courtyard is encircled on the southern, western and northern sides by buildings used for different purposes. The upstairs of the building on the south is the quarters for the Melsanti or chief priest who is not expected to leave the premises of the temple during his six-month term of service as he has to observe strict celibacy during the period. The section south of the western gopuram is known as the 'Agrasala' or dining hall which has also a kitchen attached to it to be used for cooking for big feasts.

The passage through the northern wall of the temple leads to the temple tank as also to the Devi shrine on the north-eastern corner.

The sanctity of the temple tank which is called Rudra-tirtha is worth noting. It is here that the processional deity or the Utsavavigraha is bathed on the last day of the annual *Utsavam.* In ancient times the tank extended as far as Mammiyur and was also famous for its lotuses. Narayana Bhattatiri refers to it in his work as 'the charming lake' while describing the episode of Prachetas, which is briefly alluded here.

King Pracheenabarhis* had ten sons known by the common name of Prachetas. The king, keen in the desire of creation, advised his sons "to marry and multiply." Accordingly they left the country and came to the Rudratirtha. They saw emerging from the waters, Siva who, pleased with their salutations, taught them the hymns called the *Rudragita* in praise of Mahavishnu by virtue of which he said they would attain their object.

As enjoined by Siva, they meditated on Vishnu, standing in the waters of the lake for ten thousand years. At last Mahavishnu appeared before them and granted them the boon that they would have a noble and illustrious son who would fill the three worlds with his progeny. They married Marisa who gave birth to Daksha and he filled the earth with his children.

* Pracheenabarhis alias Barhishadan, was so called, as he during his sacrifice covered the entire earth with the darbha grass spread eastwards.

The recitation of *Rudragita* is considered to be very efficacious and even today devotees who want children repeat the hymn standing in the water as Prachetas did and also go to Mammiyur to pray to Siva.

In conclusion, here is an interesting account of Guruvayur temple with special reference to its architecture, extracted from *Malabar Gazetteer* by Innes and revised by Evans.

"The most popular of all the Kerala temples at present is the Krishna shrine at Guruvayur which has sprung into importance from about the sixteenth century. This temple is square in shape and is enclosed on the east and south by a lofty laterite wall; on the west by tiled buildings, where pilgrims are lodged and fed; and on the north by a bathing tank built of laterite steps. The Srikoil or central shrine square in shape and having two Prasadas or storeys, the Nalambalam around it and Kuttambalams in the outer courtyard where Puranas are recited, are all roofed with copper. A conspicuous feature of this temple is the lofty bell-metal Dwajasthambha (flag-staff) 110 ft. in height, plated with gold. A wide street leaps up through rows of shops to the eastern and main gateway of the temple which is surmounted by a two-storeyed Gopura. The porch and its pillars are elaborately carved with heads of elephants and bulls and other sculptures in bold relief: and its walls are covered with gaudy frescoes depicting the adventures of Arjuna, the Pandava. A Sanskrit inscription on one of the walls of the temple recites that the temple within is heaven and the gateway and the ladder thereto were built by the Lord of the Seas and Hills and had been trodden by the feet of many

kings. The writing is in comparatively modern Malayalam characters; and by the Lord of the Seas and Hills, the Zamorin probably is meant. The Deepasthambha in front of the gateway has two inscriptions recording the fact that it was erected by a native of Travancore in 1011 M.E. (1836 A.D.): and fragments of another inscription are seen on a broken slab of granite now used as a door step in the house of Mallisseri Namboothiri. Adjoining the temple in the north is the Arattukulam, where the idol is bathed in the month of Kumbham (February). A writing on the granite door-post of the western entrance which is also covered with a Gopura relates that the gate was erected by Panikkaveettil Ittiraricha Menon, Karyasthan, in 922 M.E. (1747 A.D.). Pilgrims, especially those subjected to rheumatism, resort to Guruvayur temple in large numbers and make offerings. Grouped around the temple are the houses of Ooralers or trustees viz., Zamorin and Mallisseri Namboothiri and those of the Eralappad Raja, Punnathoor Nambidi and many of the higher castes. The great Ekadasi festival is held annually about the second week of December; and it is very largely attended to by pilgrims from all parts of Malabar."

The devastating fire on the night of November 29, 1970, which destroyed parts of the temple in the rear and on the sides necessitated the reconstruction and renovation of this immortal temple. The reconstruction of the destroyed portions of the temple in accordance with the ancient sastras thus became a challenge to modern architects.

A Temple Renovation Committee was constituted for this purpose with the Minister-in-charge of Religious Endowments as the President and the late Shri Kelappan as the

working President. Shri K. K. Menon, who had worked for many years as executive officer of famous temples like Madurai, Tiruchendur, Srirangam, Palni, etc., was appointed as the Special Officer and Secretary of the Committee.

An expert committee was also constituted with the following members:

Shri E. Madhavan Nair, Superintending Engineer, Buildings, Trivandrum.

Shri K. Rajagopalan, Chief Engineer, FACT Engineering and Design Organisation, Udyogamandal.

Shri Chennas Parameswaran Nambudiripad, Tantri of Guruvayur temple.

Shri Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad and Shri Easwara Varrier of Tripunnithura, experts in *Thachusastras*.*

The expert committee had made the following points:

"(i) The temple has grown in public importance and is attracting more and more worshippers every day. This has to be taken into account and maximum facilities are to be given for their convenience.

(ii) Renovation should be strictly in accordance with the *sastras*.

(iii) Kerala has its own culture, its own mode of temple architecture—this individuality should be preserved.

* Science of architecture.

(iv) Inflammable materials should be avoided; the material should be as far as possible granite; services of experts in the line like Shri S. K. Achary who was responsible for the building of the Vivekananda Memorial of Kanyakumari should be availed of."

The plan of work and estimates prepared by the expert committee were examined by the engineers. They were then further subjected to scrutiny by astrologers to see whether the scheme had the approval of the Lord. The main proposals for renovation were:

(i) to widen the gateway at the eastern and northern sides.

(ii) to remove the existing walls of the Nalambalam and Chuttambalam and have beautifully carved granite pillars instead.

(iii) to have a granite wall adjacent to Vilakkumatam.

(iv) In the place of the painting of Anantasayanam (the Lord reclining on the serpent) which was destroyed by fire, to have a beautiful sculpture of it on the rear side granite wall—this to be executed by Shri S. K. Achary.

(v) The Ganapati shrine on the south-west corner inside the temple is to be constructed in granite with space all around for circumambulation.

Of these the first proposal of widening the entrance doors on the east and the north was not permitted after an astrological investigation. All other suggestions were found

acceptable to the Lord and were therefore carried out. Due care was taken to preserve the traditional style of the temple and no marked deviation was made.

As prescribed by the astrologers the work was started on 1st May 1971 between 4 and 5 A.M. The foundation stone was laid by none other than His Holiness Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Pithadhipati Sri Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati Swamigal. In the 8th century Adi Sankaracharya was stopped in his celestial journey and made to get down at Guruvayur to establish the puja routine. Today, 12 centuries later, this Sankaracharya too had to change his set tour programme to participate in a function that gave shape to the new plan for the reconstruction of the temple.

The granite work was executed by two experts, Shri S. K. Achary and Shri P. S. Baliya. The various sculptural works such as the pillars and walls are standing monuments to the excellence of their craftsmanship.

A fact worth mentioning in this connection was the discovery of fine quarries nearby as though indicating the Lord's grace in the work of renovation. While it is said that the best stones available are at Ambassamudram in Tamil Nadu, those found near Guruvayur have been acknowledged by experts to excel them. The cost of the first stage of renovation amounted to about Rs. 20 lakhs.

Two other phases of work have also been planned by the Committee. Reconstruction of the buildings and structures in the temple premises, a hall for conducting Bhagavata Saptaham, better facilities for the conduct of marriages,

repairing of the temple tank etc. are the main works under the second phase. The supply of water, sanitation, of more choultries and rest-houses for the use of the poor are some of the works under the third phase. All the three phases together are estimated to cost about one crore rupees.

"*Nainam dahati pavakah*". Fire does not destroy the self, says the *Gita*. The Guruvayur temple too is indestructible. Even if its structure of wood and stone can be damaged, it is rebuilt to the greater glory of the Lord.

CHAPTER V

## DAILY WORSHIP AND OFFERINGS

Guruvayur temple follows an elaborate system of rites, which according to tradition is traced to Sri Adi Sankaracharya.

Once, when Sri Sankara was journeying in the sky with Narada, the latter told the philosopher-saint that he was descending to Guruvayur. It was Ekadasi, the auspicious day when Lord Krishna imparted the *Gita* to Arjuna—whoever had darshan of Lord Krishna at Guruvayur on this occasion would receive divine blessings in full measure. It is said that Sri Sankara did not care to follow the example of Narada even after being told about the glory of Guruvayurappan. He thought that idol worship and the mere repetition of the Lord's name were meant for the ignorant, and not for a supreme *jnani* like him. So he continued his celestial voyage but hardly had he advanced a few yards when he had a fall and lay prostrate on the ground just to the northern side of the temple. He realised how he had erred in ignoring the deity of Guruvayur and cried out to the Lord to forgive him. (There is still a hole testifying to the impact

of Sri Sankara's fall on the ground and even now, when the deity is taken out in procession round the temple, music is stopped for a while at this spot as a respite for Sri Sankara to ask for pardon and make obeisance to Lord Guruvayurappan.)

The merciful Lord appeared before Sri Sankara and said to him that He was pleased with his faith and devotion. He told him that worship in temples, repetition of the Lord's name, listening to religious discourses and participating in temple festivals were all different ways of expressing one's devotion to God. He said that Sankara should realise that He had incarnated Himself at Guruvayur to save people from the ills of the terrible Kaliyuga. The Lord asked Sri Sankara to spread the divine glory of Guruvayur all over the world.

The Lord further enjoined him to stay on at Guruvayur for 41 days in constant meditation. Thus would people learn of the greatness and glory of constant worship to Him. He also conveyed his desire that Sri Sankara should draw up plans for the daily puja at this shrine. On Ekadasi day, He said there should be a grand festival with dawn to dusk worship. Sri Sankara carried out the divine behest with the utmost devotion. Even today the system of daily rites at the temple is practised in accordance with the directions given by Sri Sankara.* He entrusted the responsibility for conducting the annual Ekadasi festival to the royal family of Chiralayam.

* "Guruvayur Ekadasi" by Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri, *Bhavan's Journal*, Annual Number, August 10, 1969.

Ordinarily, there are four main pujas in great temples—Ushah (early morning), Pantirati (9 A.M.), Uchcha (midday), and Athazha (night). But at Guruvayur there are five—'Panchamahapuja'—the additional one is the "Etrittu" puja following the Ushah puja. The Srikoil is opened at 3 A.M. to the melodious notes of the Nadaswaram and the full-throated chants of 'Narayana', 'Narayana' by thousands of eagerly waiting devotees. To have the *darshan* of the Lord at the time the Srikoil opens, with the Lord still adorned with the flowers and garlands of the previous day, is considered specially auspicious—this is known as the *Nirmalya darshan—Viswarupa darshan.*

After allowing sufficient time for *bhaktas* to have this *darshan,* the Melsanti (Head Priest) removes from the deity the adornments of the previous day. Thereafter various *abhishekams* (rite of bathing the deity) are conducted which include those with gingelly oil, water poured from a *sankha* and a *kumbha* or pot followed by the offering of *malar* (puffed rice). This ceremony lasts till 6.30 A.M. As mentioned earlier, the idol is carved out of the rare stone called *'Patala Anjanam'* known in English as "black bismuth", "Magnetic iron stone" or "Sulphuret of Antimony". Water and oil used in bathing the idol are believed to possess curative qualities. Particularly, the gingelly oil used in the abhishekam is considered efficacious in the treatment of rheumatism and is hence taken home by the devotees and preserved.

The oil on the deity is removed by the application of *Vaka**—this is known as *vakacharthu.*

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* 'Vaka' is the bark of a tree, which is powdered and used. In olden days in Kerala it was used in place of soap. It is highly

The daily *kumbhabhishekam* is a speciality of Guruvayur. It is done with a golden pot with water sanctified through the *Brahmakalasa mantra.* This is usually done in other temples only on special occasions for enhancing the *chaitanya* (divine life) of the deity.

After the *abhishekams,* the deity is adorned with garlands, ear ornaments, *kasturi-tilaka* and a red loin-cloth. Butter in the hand and playing the flute, He appears as Balagopala (child Krishna) reminiscent of his playful days at Gokul, stealing butter and performing several other 'lilas'.

The Srikoil then remains closed for about 30 minutes for Ushah puja followed by Etrittu puja. When it opens again, the deity is taken out for Siveli (in procession). There is a miniature idol in gold (Utsava Vigraha) which is mounted on an elephant and taken round the temple (Matilakam) three times, accompanied by the beating of drums like the maddalam, and the playing of the kombu, Nadaswaram, etc. A thousand devotees sing in chorus:

*"Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare*
*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare*
*Hare."*

In front of the deity, 12 lighted silver lamps are held in rows by members of certain families whose privilege it is to do this service. The head priest leads the procession in the first round and offers *naivedyams* to *Belikallus* (altars) situated at different places in the 'Matilakam'.

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antiseptic and has many medical properties. The legend behind Vaka charthu is narrated in chapter VIII.

It is important to know the significance of this ritual. In the eight corners of the inner '*prakara*' and at several places in the outer '*prakara*' there are *belikallus* representing the Lord's bodyguards, subsidiary deities and members of His entourage. For instance on either side of the sanctum are Chandan Prachandan and Anandanandas. There is Indra below the *sopanam* (steps leading to the sanctum) while the *mandapa* in front of the sanctum is the abode of Garuda. Agni is on the south-east corner. On the south are Ganapati, Dakshinamurti, Yama, Virabhadra, Vighneswara, Ayyappa and the Saptamatas namely, Brahmani, Maheshwari, Skaanda Sakti, Vaishnavi, Vaarahi, Indrani and Chamundi. On the south-west corner there are Ganapati, Ananta, Nirthidevan while on the west are Anantasayanam and Varuna. Vayu, Durga and Subrahmanya are on the north-west corner, Soma and Vaisravana on the north, Nirmalyadhari and Isana and Brahma on the north-east corner. There is again Varuna in the temple well while on the Vatilmatams are Sri Pushti, Sankha and Chakra.

Similarly, in the outer prakara, the big *belikallu* to the west of the Dwajasthamba represents Harisenan and Dwajavahana. The small *belikallus* around the big one and those on the four sides of the Matilakam are said to represent the entourage of the Lord like Kumuda. The one on the north-east is that of Kshetrapala. In front of the Sasta shrine is Bhadrakali while to the north of the Dwajasthamba are *belikallus* for Guru and Vayu, the founders of the temple. The idea of the *Siveli* and of the priest performing ceremonies at these places is that the Lord Himself stands by as offerings are made to his dependants.*

* "Hantha! Bhagyam Jananam" by Shri Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri in "Shri Guruvayurappan" Magazine, April 1972.

Incidentally, it is an offence to set foot on the *belikallus* since they represent the different gods and demi-gods.

The morning *Siveli* is over by 7.30 A.M. Then follows another series of *abhishekams* beginning with '*Kshirabhishekam*' (bathing in milk) which is supposed to represent the *Govindabhisheka* which Indra performed in Vrindavan. Milk, tender coconuts and rose water are offered in plenty by the devotees for this purpose. After 'Kshirabhishekam' there is *Navakabhishekam* which is conducted with water filled in nine silver pots and sanctified after a course of pujas. This is followed by *Pantirati puja* and *naivedyam* performed between 9 and 9.30 A.M.

The next ceremony is the *Uchcha* (midday) *puja* which is the most important for the day. It is at this time that the brahmins are fed in the two 'Vatilmatams'. The Srikoil is closed around 12.30 P.M. after the Uccha puja. There should normally be another procession of the deity after this puja, but at Guruvayur this practice does not obtain.

As soon as the temple opens again at 5 in the evening the second procession around the temple is gone through as in the morning. Then as dusk falls, to the blowing of conch-shells, is performed the '*diparadhana*' (*aarati*). The deity, specially bedecked, has the serene radiance of the evening sun and the temple itself is bathed in the light of a myriad lamps. The inner *prakara* is filled with eager, fervent worshippers. It is as if all Guruvayur throbs with devotion. The ringing of bells, the beating of drums and cymbals, the sound of horns and the pipes and above all the full-throated cries of 'Narayana', 'Narayana' filling the air create Vaikuntha on earth.

After last *puja*—'Athazha' (night) puja, commencing at about 8 P.M. the idol is taken in procession again, for the third time, around the temple. Brahmins are fed in the Vatilmatams during this puja also. The day's rituals are appropriately concluded with the 'Trippuka', the burning of *ashtagandham* in a silver tray inside the Srikoil. The temple is closed around 10 P.M.

It will be of interest to know the organisational set-up behind the orderly conduct of the daily rites. In overall charge is the Melsanti (Head Priest) who is assisted by a Tantri and number of Assistant Pujaris (Kizhusantis) engaged in the preparation of *naivedyams,* sandal paste and such other sundry services as required by the Melsanti. Then there are a number of Ambalavasis (temple servants) drawn from certain privileged families of Variyars, Nambisans, Pisharotis, etc., whose chores consist in collecting flowers, making garlands and holding the lamps in the processions. Pattukarans, literally meaning 'men for ten days' are another class of attendants. It is the duty of the Pattukaran to supply by turn every material required for the various pujas, *naivedyams* etc. for a ten-day period. This privilege is also hereditary.

The Melsanti's tenure usually lasts six months during which period he has to observe strict celibacy and has to live within the temple precincts. Of the five pujas he performs four. The Pantirati puja and naivedyam are performed by the 'Tantri' or the 'Otikkans' (literally chanters of the Vedas). The Tantri must have expert knowledge of temple rituals. His is also a hereditary office. When doubts arise with regard to any ceremonial or ritual his decision is final.

Otikkans attached to Guruvayur are drawn from four Nambudiri families. Their functions are akin to those of Tantri. The Melsanti, the Tantri and the Otikkans are the only persons privileged to touch the deity and perform *pujas*. The Kizhusantis can enter the Srikoil but cannot touch the idol.

*Offerings*

Every day thousands of devotees visit the Guruvayur shrine. The favours they seek of the Lord are different—cure of bodily ills, mental peace, progeny, success in vocations and examinations and, above all, salvation. There are those who stay there for a day or two and worship. They depart wishing they could come again. Then there are those who go to Guruvayur for *Tinkal*, or monthly bhajan, or the 41-day bhajan in fulfilment of a vow or just to propitiate the Lord.

Their offerings too vary from a small *'archana'* (offering of flowers) costing a few paise to the elaborate *Udayastamana puja* which consists of 21 special pujas from sunrise to sunset, costing about three thousand rupees. (In fact, the rites of this puja commence with the 'Athazham' of the previous night). The expenses for this offering thus include the 'Athazham' 'Namaskarams' (noon meals) for the day, Vilakku and Elephant procession etc. in the evening.

There are a variety of *archanas, alankaras* and *naivedyams* which can be offered. A list is prominently displayed at the counters in the outer prakaras. There are also ceremonies like marriages, *annaprasana* or the first feeding

of children with rice, etc., held in the temple. Hundreds of couples are united in wedlock every day before the Lord.

*Tulabharam* is another common vow. In this the devotee is weighed against bananas, sugar, jaggery, coconuts, sandalwood or any other article of daily use. The articles weighed are gifted to the temple.

An incident that took place at a *Tulabharam* ceremony is worth mentioning here. A devotee vowed to have himself weighed against plantains before the Lord. At the time of the weighing ceremony, however, he had a costly silk dhoti on. His mother, thinking that it might get soiled, asked him to remove it and wear instead an ordinary cotton cloth which he did. He squatted on one pan of the scales and plantains were loaded on to the other pan. People were amazed to see that no amount of bananas could match the man's weight. A priest who happened to witness this suggested that the silk cloth also be placed on the devotee's pan. When this was done the scales became even.

Faith in the efficacy of the *Tulabharam* ceremony at Guruvayur has lately extended to members of other religions as well. On October 24, 1969, a Muslim girl named Safia belonging to Vadakara was weighed against plantains. The ceremony was conducted outside the eastern nada in the pandal. Safia was the eleventh child of her parents who had lost their previous ten issues soon after birth. The dejected couple, on the advice of their neighbours, undertook the vow that if their eleventh child survived they would conduct the *Tulabharam* ceremony at Guruvayur. The Lord fulfilled their wish and the grateful couple thus made their

humble offering.* Another *Tulabharam* was conducted during March 1971 for a Christian youth named Kochappan, son of Vellara Devassi of Turuvenkitam. He was weighed against tender coconuts of which 32 were used to balance his weight. A few years back Kochappan who is a wood-cutter could not work as his eyes were afflicted by some disease. He undertook this vow for Lord Guruvayurappan as a result of which his trouble gradually disappeared and he started working again for his livelihood.**

Instances like this could be multiplied, but the underlying factor is that God's mercy knows no bounds of caste, creed, religion or status.

A word about the real significance of making offerings to Gods would be appropriate here. It would be wrong to regard it as a bribe given to the deity for a favour. It is actually a surrender of at least a part of our possessions. Renunciation, that is self-denial or giving up things is the real test of a true devotee. In the words of Kaivalya Upanishad:

न कर्मणा न प्रजया धनेन त्यागेनैकेन अमृतत्वमानशुः।

[Not by work, not by offspring nor wealth—only by renunciation does one attain immortality.] To illustrate this Sri K. K. Menon, Special Officer for Renovation of Guruvayur Temple, relates the experience of a wealthy mill-owner of Coimbatore*** some years ago when he was Assistant Commissioner at Pálni.

* "Sri Guruvayurappan" Magazine, November 1969.
** "Sri Guruvayurappan" Magazine, March 1971.
*** Vazhivadu by K. K. Menon, B.A., B.L. "Shri Guruvayurappan" Magazine, April 1970.

The mill owner in question was suffering from a severe pain in his hand. He had consulted leading doctors in Madras, but to no avail. Once he and his wife attended a discourse on *Narayaniyam* by the late Sengalipuram Anantharama Dikshitar at Coimbatore. At the end, the mill-owner's wife made her husband promise that he would offer the diamond necklace he was wearing to Lord Guruvayurappan if he was cured. He had, however, a sentimental attachment to the necklace as it had been gifted to him by his grandfather. But he disregarded it and mentally resolved to offer it to Guruvayurappan. To his pleasant surprise, the pain now gradually subsided and the couple decided to make the promised visit to Guruvayur and deposit the necklace in the *hundi*.

But, prior to their departure, the mill owner who had second thoughts made enquiries with the leading diamond merchants at Coimbatore. They opined that the maximum price the necklace would fetch was Rs. 3,500. He decided to be liberal and on reaching Guruvayur he deposited Rs. 4,000 in the *hundi* in lieu of the necklace which he was reluctant to part with.

The couple returned to Coimbatore fully satisfied with the supreme sacrifice they had made. But to their dismay the husband got pain in his hand again. The family astrologer was consulted and right enough he attributed it to the wrath of the Lord. The couple had no other choice but to go to Guruvayur again and deposit the precious jewel in the *hundi*. Needless to add that the pain too disappeared for ever within a week of their return home.

It should again be remembered that the Lord accepts whatever is given in devotion and rejects everything, however expensive, offered without devotion. This idea has been proclaimed by the Lord Himself in the *Gita* as follows:

पत्रं पुष्पं फलं तोयं यो मे भक्त्या प्रयच्छति ।
तदहं भक्त्युपहृतं अश्नामि प्रयतात्मनः ।।

—*Bhagavad Gita*

[I accept and enjoy whatever is offered in devotion—leaf, flower, fruit or water, while what is given without devotion, however costly it may be, does not conduce to my joy.]

The gruel offered by Vidura was accepted with delight by Sri Krishna. The beaten rice hesitatingly brought by Sudama (Kuchela) was pulled out from the folds of his garment and partaken of with relish by Him. In her anxiety to offer the best to Sri Rama, Sabari bit each fruit and gave it to the Lord after being satisfied that it was good. Lord Siva accepted the tongue-tainted venison and mouthful of water offered by the hunter Kannappa.*

There are many more examples like this. The Lord along with Nanda and others were encamping at Mathura on the eve of the destruction of King Kamsa. When He went about sight-seeing, a tailor presented garments befit-

* *The Bhagavad Gita*, Commentary by Swami Chidbhavananda.

ting Krishna and Balarama—to the former a yellow garment and to the latter a blue-coloured one. As a result the tailor was able to attain salvation. Later the Lord blessed the garland-maker Sudama who had joyfully presented Him with garlands and a bouquet and praised Him with hymns. At the instance of the Lord, he chose two boons, viz, devotion and wealth which seldom exist together in one. Yet the Lord of Goddess Lakshmi readily granted both the boons as requested by His devotee.

Then there was the woman Kubja, the hunch back, who used to prepare the toilet for Kamsa. On her way to the king's palace, she met Krishna and presented Him with scented ointment. To reveal the uprightness in her body that was in her mind, He removed her hunch and made her a beautiful woman. Her love towards the Lord was but another form of devotion.*

What matters to the Lord therefore is bhakti. Material abundance is of no avail to gain access to the Lord. It is disinterested devotion to which the Lord submits Himself. The incidents at Mathura also indicate that only the meritorious could have a glimpse of the Lord. In fact, as poet Bhattatiri describes, the Lord set out along with His companions to see the city as if being dragged by the chains of the merits of the citizens like the tailor, Sudama or Kubja.

The Lord further elaborates:

यत्करोषि यदश्नासि यज्जुहोषि ददासि यत् ।
यत्तपस्यसि कौन्तेय तत्कुरुष्व मदर्पणम् ।।

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* *Narayaniyam*, Commentary by P. N. Menon, B.A., B.L.

[Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you gift away, whatever austerity you practise, O Kaunteya (Arjuna), do it as an offering to Me.]

The panacea for all the evils of earthly life is prescribed here. Making gifts is often for self-advertisement. Practising austerity with self-interest may bring in spiritual vanity. But when all these good deeds are done for the glory of the Lord, the doer emerges as the divine. The turning point in life comes in dedicating everything to God, instead of petitioning to Him for things here and hereafter.*

It is with this understanding that we should offer to the Lord whatever we can, but with devotion. While some of the more important *vazhivadus* have already been described, here are details of some others available for the devotees with the minimum rates in vogue:

(1) Ghee lamps 0.25 P.

(2) Garland 0.25 P.

(3) Palpayasam Re. 1.00. Prepared by cooking rice in milk and mixing sugar. This is considered to be a favourite of the Lord.

(4) Neipayasam Re. 1.

(5) Sarkarapayasam Re. 1.

(6) Irrattipayasam Rs. 5.

(7) Paladaprathaman Rs. 10.

These 'payasams' are preparations from rice, jaggery,

* *The Bhagavad Gita*, commentary by Swami Chidbhavananda.

ghee, coconut milk, condiment, etc., in varying proportions. It is said that after the installation of the deity, Brihaspati (Guru) got Kamadhenu (the celestial cow) who by virtue of her gift, produced these delicacies and the very first puja was performed with them and with butter and Trimadhuram as *naivedyams*. Hence the importance of these offerings.

(8) Butter naivedyam 0.50 P.

(9) Trimadhuram 0.50 P. This is a mixture of bananas, jaggery and honey.

(10) Appam—Re. 1.00. This is made of rice paste mixed with jaggery and fried in ghee.

(11) Ada—Re. 1.00. This is also prepared by mixing rice paste with jaggery and cooked in steam. Both these items are offered for Athaza (night) puja.

(12) Archana (ordinary)—0.25 P.

(13) -do- (Purushasuktam)—0.50 P.

(14) -do- (Ashtottaram)—Re. 1.00.

(15) -do- (Sahasranamam)—Rs. 3.00.

(16) Kalabham—Rs. 24.00. Kalabham is another popular offering. It is a mixture of sandal-paste with saffron, pachakarpuram (menthol) and rose water. The mixture is applied to the deity.

(17) Sandal-paste—0.75 P. This is the sandal-paste with which the Lord is anointed every day.

(18) Rice Naivedyam (one unit)—0.51 P. This is cooked rice offered at the time of 'Pantirati' and partaken of by devotees particularly those who observe *bhajan* at the temple.

(19) Malar Naivedyam—0.35 P. This is puffed rice offered for the Ushah (early morning) puja.

(20) Sugar and plantains—0.50 P. This is also a favourite of the Lord offered after the Ushah puja.

(21) Nirmala—Rs. 9.00. In this offering the space between Srikoil and the Mandapam is decorated with garlands of different flowers. This is usually done at the time of the Diparadhana (*Aarati*) at dusk.

(22) Annaprasana—Rs. 2.00. This is the first feeding ceremony for the child usually conducted at the time of the 'Pantirati' puja or Uchcha puja or the athazha puja. The ceremony is held near the flag-staff at which the temple official offers the tirtha (holy water) and cooked rice and payasam, which are given to the child.

(23) Marriage—Rs. 15.00. On payment of this amount the couple are offered the holy water, prasad and the garland to be exchanged by bride and groom. This ceremony is conducted in the specially erected platform outside the east nada.

(24) Kelikai—Rs. 1.10. This is a performance of Kerala's percussion instruments, namely chenda, maddalam, and elatalam (cymbals).

(25) Butter after japam—0.50 P. The butter sanctified by mantras by the chief priest is considered efficacious for the cure of many ills.

(26) Milk Abhishekam.

(27) Oil Abhishekham.

(28) Namaskaram—Rs. 350.

(29) Athazham—Rs. 350.

(30) Udayasthamana puja—Rs. 2500.

(31) Krishnattam—Rs. 2.00.

(32) Narayaniya Parayanam—0.31 P.
*(one dasakam)*

(33) Bhagavata Parayanam—0.50 P.
*(one chapter)*

(34) Gita—0.50 P.

(35) Ashtapadi—0.50 P.

(36) Bhagawati Azhal—Re. 1.00.
This is the favourite offering for Edattedattu Kavil Bhagavati. Ten or twenty wicks soaked in oil are kept in the bark of a plaintain tree and lighted before the Goddess. This is done after the night diparadhana and athazha puja.

(37) Illumination.
(38) Bhandaram (offering in *Hundi*).
(39) Maintenance of cow.
} Any amount.

(40) Tulabharam—Thattilpanam—Re. 1 apart from the cost of the articles used. The significance of this *vazhivadu* has already been explained.

(41) Alroopams—These are miniature images in silver or gold to be placed before the Lord on the *sopanam* (steps leading to the sanctum sanctorum). The devotee can keep a replica of an eye or a leg or a hand or the whole human body according to the vow taken for the cure of the disease in respect of

the particular limb or the entire body. These images are available at the mandapam in front of the Srikoil and can be used after depositing whatever amount the devotee desires to put in the *hundi*. Devotees are warned against purchasing them and Kalabham from outside as they are available inside the temple itself.

(42) Picking up of Kunnikuru—In order to develop intelligence and smartness in children a handful of Kunnikuru (Abrus precatorius) is taken and deposited three times in a vessel kept near the Dipasthambha to the south of the flag-staff. The amount vowed by the devotee is deposited in the *hundi*.

For any further information regarding the conduct of the *vazhivadus* devotees may contact the Assistant Manager (Temple) or the Superintendent. Compared to other big temples, touts are rare at Guruvayur, but one has to be wary.

## CHAPTER VI

# FESTIVALS

"A temple in Kerala", writes K.P.S. Menon in his autobiography, "is at once a house of prayer, a social club and a cultural centre." This is particularly true during the annual festival (*utsavam*) which almost every temple in Kerala conducts. Not only is it a special occasion for worship, it provides opportunities for social rejoicing. People gather in their thousands from surrounding villages and towns to participate in the general merriment. Fairs and exhibitions are held, also music and dance recitals.

There are temples where the *utsavam* lasts as long as ten days or even more. The hoisting of the temple flag usually marks the beginning of the celebrations. While the flag-staffs elsewhere in India are very short, in Kerala they are 60 to 70 feet high. In the better endowed shrines they are gold plated while in others they are covered with copper. Where there is no permanent flag-staff make-shift ones are provided with arecanut poles or bamboos for the duration of the festival. Elaborate pujas are held during the flag-hoisting ceremony.

The procession of elephants is a distinctive feature of Kerala temple festivals. Gorgeously caparisoned elephants with colourful parasols and *alavattams* held aloft over them and *chamaras* swinging provide a grand spectacle. The processional deity is carried on the tallest elephant which is flanked by others in the order of their heights. The number of elephants employed is a matter of prestige for the festival. (At the famous *Pooram* celebration in Trichur as many as 30 elephants participate.) The procession is accompanied by various drums, horns and pipes. A special concert of instruments is known as the *Panchavadyam* consisting of timala, maddalam, edaka, elathalam, kombu (and also conch). The nadaswaram is also sometimes played.

The festivities include programmes like Kathakali, the famous dance-drama, Ottantullal, Chakyarkuttu (narration of a story based on Sanskrit text with commentary in Malayalam interspersed with the narrator's wit), pathakam (story-telling), music, etc. Displays of fire works at night are another attraction. Debates and religious discourses are also held by scholars to propagate Hindu dharma. In the old days it was customary to feed Brahmins in special sheds or *uttupuras* which could seat thousands.

The festival culminates in the *aaratu* when the deity is bathed in the temple tank amidst the chanting of mantras. Devotees also have a holy dip along with the deity, which is considered to be highly auspicious. Thereafter the temple flag is lowered signifying the end of the ceremonies.

Apart from annual festivals there are seasonal festivals (described later) during 'Vaisakha', 'Mandalam' etc. In

addition there are days of special significance. But the essential features like special pujas, elephant procession, music, gathering of large crowds, etc. are common to all festivals.

On this account every day is a day of festivities at Guruvayur. But there are occasions which are marked by special celebrations, pomp and grandeur. The two important seasonal festivals here are 'Mandalam' and 'Vaisakha'.

*Mandalam*

The 'Mandalam' begins from the first of the solar month of Vrischikam (mid-November) and lasts 41 days. The period is regarded as highly auspicious throughout Kerala. This is the time for the pilgrimage to the shrine of Lord Ayyappa at Sabarimala: millions of devotees observe austerities in preparation for the arduous trek to the Sabari Hills. The pilgrims visit important shrines on the way. There is thus a rush of pilgrims at Guruvayur too during the season.

*Abhishekam* with *Panchagavya*—a mixture of five elements belonging to the cow (milk, curd, ghee, urine and cowdung) is a speciality during this season. Many devotees visit the shrine now to partake of it, since it is believed to burn up all inner impurities. The concluding day of the Mandalam is marked by the *Kalabhabhishekam* of the deity. This special offering is made only once a year and it is the hereditary privilege of the Zamorin Raja to make it.

*Ekadasi Festival*

A word about the significance of Ekadasi would be

appropriate here before we describe the Ekadasi festival at Guruvayur.

Once Mahavishnu, seated on his vehicle Garuda, visited the abode of Yama (God of Death). Overjoyed at the Lord's visit the latter welcomed Him and paid reverent homage to him. While accepting Yama's hospitality, the Lord heard heart-rending cries emanating from the southern direction. They were uttered by sinners undergoing tortures in hell. On His expressing a desire to see the unfortunate spirits, He was taken to the torture chambers. The all-merciful Lord was deeply moved at the sight of the sufferings. He found Himself thinking as to how to save those unfortunates from further suffering.

The holy Ekadasi day was at hand. And He found Himself uttering the name 'Ekadasi'. And, lo, the very mention of the word removed all their sins. Such is the purifying effect of the observance of Ekadasi as proclaimed in the *Padma Purana*. In fact of all the 'vratas' (penances), Ekadasi is the most efficacious and its observance is enjoined on all people irrespective of *varnas* and *ashramas* and sex.

Thus every Ekadasi—the eleventh day of every lunar fortnight—is auspicious. Of the 24 Ekadasis in a year, some have special significance like Ashada Ekadasi in Pandharpur, (Maharashtra), Vaikuntha Ekadasi in Srirangam (Tamil Nadu) and 'Vrischika' Ekadasi (Sukla Paksha) in Guruvayur.

The Ekadasi festival is the most important occasion during the Mandalam season (mid-November to December end) when tens of thousands visit this shrine to have a glimpse

of the deity. As mentioned earlier, even before the temple entry proclamation in 1935 all Hindus irrespective of caste or creed were allowed to enter the temple on this day. There is a story that an orthodox Nambudiri was perturbed at the sight of so many 'avarnas' (Harijans) at the temple. He complained to the Sage Bilvamangalam Swamiyar that the temple had been defiled. The redoubtable Swamiyar smiled, and asked him to touch his body when, lo, the old brahmin saw every devotee as Sri Krishna Himself.

The Ekadasi celebrations begin eighteen days in advance. By way of a prelude there is what is called *Vilakku*, a festival of lights, on all these days: gaily caparisoned elephants are taken in procession round the temple after the night puja to the accompaniment of the usual drums. The eleven rows of lights on the Vilakkumatam around the *nalambalam* and the majestic dipasthambhams inside and outside the temple are lighted during the procession. The spectacle provided is indeed eye-filling.

The expenses of the Vilakku on different days are met out of contributions from certain families who have been recipients of the blessings of Lord Guruvayurappan at one time or another. Here is the true story of one such family. Some fifty years ago two devotees, a brother and a sister from an ancient family in Koladi, came here to pray during the Ekadasi festival. The sister was past forty and had no children. While the astrologers had predicted that she would have no issue, a renowned doctor of Madras had advised a surgical operation if at all she was to conceive. The brother and sister prayed devotedly and vowed that, if by Guruvayurappan's grace a child would be born to the sister they

would bear the expenses of the illumination on the ninth day (Navami) of the festival. As though by a miracle before the next Navami Vilakku she gave birth to a son. Since then the expenses of the Navami Vilakku which till then were met by the Head Priest of the temple are borne by this Koladi family.*

On the concluding day of the festival, that is on Ekadasi, the sanctum sanctorum remains open from early morning till the following dawn (Dwadasi) to enable the lakhs of worshippers to pray. In fact, not satisfied with remaining inside the temple, the Lord comes out in procession on this day and gives darshan to the multitudes outside the temple. The whole atmosphere is filled with the chanting of sacred hymns and the singing of the praises of the Lord. It is as if sage Narada graces the occasion and fills the hearts of people with his divine music.

As described earlier, it was on Ekadasi that Sri Sankaracharya, in his celestial voyage with Narada, came down at Guruvayur and remained there for 41 days and prescribed the elaborate puja routine for the temple. It was also on this day that the Lord revealed the *Gita* to Arjuna. The day further commemorates the story of Govardhana Yaga which Sri Krishna performed instead of the Indra Yaga which the people of Gokulam used to conduct till then evidently to appease Indra. Indra felt offended and sent his thunderbolt to destroy the whole of Gokulam. When the innocent people cried out in fear and prayed to Sri Krishna for protection, He lifted up the mountain of Govardhana and gave shelter

* "Guruvayur Ekadasi" by Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri, *Bhavan's Journal*, Annual Number, August 10, 1969.

to them. Indra thus humbled, asked for Sri Krishna's forgiveness. Legend has it that on Guruvayur Ekadasi Day Indra comes with Kamadhenu (Surabhi) and gives all material wealth and offers worship to receive Sri Krishna's blessings.*

Above all, Guruvayur is further rendered holy with the belief that on Ekadasi day, all the *tirthas* like Kashi, Badari, Sabarigiri and Palani, besides all the rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna assemble in the sacred precincts. Small wonder, the Guruvayur Ekadasi is considered the most holy of all Ekadasis.

*Vaisakha*

The Vaisakha is the lunar month commencing from the new moon of Mesha (April-May) to the following new moon. The *Vaisakha vrata* or observance of austerities during this month is considered specially sacred to Vishnu. The main features of the vow: early morning ablutions when the waters are believed to be sanctified by the presence of the Ganga and other gods and goddesses; feeding the poor; abstinence from stale food; partaking of food after it has been offered to the Lord; practising *namasankirtana;* listening to religious discourses; in short, participating in everything divine.

Akshaya Tritiya is the most auspicious day of this month —it is also the birthday of Balarama. The full moon day and the following Dwadasi are also sacred.

There was a king called Dharmikan in ancient Panchala.

* "Guruvayur Ekadasi" by Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri.

He was valorous and mighty and endowed with prosperity. But, despite his valour and prowess, he lost his kingdom to his enemies and was exiled to the forest. There he lived the life of a hunter. Once he invoked his family guru to ascertain the cause of his suffering.

The guru told him that he had been a hunter in a previous birth. Never devoted to God, he indulged in such despicable acts like drinking, hunting, dacoity, etc. Once he robbed two merchants and killed one of them. A maharishi who was watching this took fright and ran for his life. While doing so he fell down on the way on account of exhaustion. The hunter, however, saw him, and tended him. By virtue of this act he was born as a king in his next life.

On the advice of the guru, Dharmikan observed *Vaisakha vrata* in atonement. The Lord, pleased with his devotion appeared before him and blessed him. That day is Akshaya Tritiya which is hence specially holy during the Vaisakha season.*

While the observance of *Vaisakha vrata* is efficacious everywhere, at Guruvayur it is particularly so. A prince belonging to the ruling family of the erstwhile Travancore State was a great devotee. A saint presented him with a *salagrama* which the prince treasured and worshipped with great devotion. He and his subjects, however, suffered from certain disaster.

The prince sought the saint and asked his advice. He was told that if the *salagrama* was worshipped in the presence

* "Sree Guruvayurappan" by Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri.

of Lord Vishnu good results would follow. The prince, therefore, resorted to the family deity Sri Padmanabha. Yet things did not improve.

Finally, he betook himself to Guruvayur and dedicated the *salagrama* to Sri Guruvayurappan. It is believed that in due course it merged with the idol. Since then the princely family used to offer *palpayasam* (milk pudding) during the midday puja to Sri Guruvayurappan, which practice continued until recently.

These legends indicate why Vaisakha is specially holy at Guruvayur and attracts a large number of devotees. The observance of the *vrata* is mainly a matter of *bhakti* and has no special ritual significance. The devotees have darshans of the Lord during all the pujas. Participating in the *sivelis,* chanting the Lord's names, listening to the *Bhagavata,* they remain in constant bliss.

*Utsavam*

Next to the Ekadasi festival, the 10-day Utsavam conducted in the month of Kumbha (February-March) is another major attraction. It is celebrated with pomp and pageantry, but the accent is on the various Tantric rites which are important for the prosperity of the temple. It commences under the constellation of Pushya and lasts ten days marked by rituals, grand feasts, processions of elephants and illuminations.

A feature of this festival is the elephant race on the inaugural day. At the auspicious moment or *muhurtam* the temple flag is hoisted after prolonged ceremonials and pujas.

Before this all the temple elephants are ranged in a line some half a mile from the eastern gopuram. The animals are made to run through the eastern nada and the one which arrives at the Dwajasthamba first has to stay within the temple walls for 10 days. · It is not to be taken out during the period.

The origin of this custom goes back to the olden days when the Devaswom did not own any elephant (now it owns dozens). It was the practice in those days for big land-owners, aristocrats and philanthropists to offer their elephants free of charge to the temple on festival days. Once there was no elephant available at the start of the ceremonies since all the elephants in the area had been hired out for a festival in another temple called Trikkanamatilakam near Kodungal-lore. The authorities at Guruvayur were in a fix. Then a miracle happened. One of the elephants participating in the Trikkanamatilakam festival suddenly turned back, fled towards Guruvayur and presented itself in time for the ceremonies there. It is to commemorate this event that the elephant race is held even today which is witnessed by thousands with excitement. Since this event, no elephant is taken in pro-cession for the morning Siveli on the inaugural day.

On the following six days of the Utsavam, there are ele-phant processions three times, i.e., in the morning, in the afternoon and at night. The five gorgeously caparisoned tuskers with *chamaras* swinging and colourful parasols and *alavattams* held aloft over them, accompanied by percussion instruments, provide indeed a spectacular sight. There is also Sribhuta bali (offering of oblation at various altars) con-ducted in the morning after 'Pantirati' puja and at night

before the procession. Thereafter the deity is kept in a little decorated shrine on the northern side, and renowned drummers of Kerala play '*tayambaka*' (a pleasing orchestra of chendas and cymbals) before the 'Vilakku' or night procession.

On the eighth day is the *Utsavabali* which is a very important part of the festival. It is conducted on the southern side of the temple between 12 noon and 4 P.M. when oblations are offered to all the gods and goddesses. Thousands from far and near gather to witness the ritual. Thereafter not only devotees but also animals and birds are fed. Indeed, in olden days a basketful of cooked rice was hung from one of the branches of the Manjulal (the banyan tree hallowed by the Harijan woman Manjula which incident is described in the Chapter on 'Lilas of Lord Guruvayurappan') to be eaten by birds.

The ninth day is marked by 'Pallivetta' or the hunting expedition by the Lord. On this day the procession is led outside the temple and goes round the outer walls and the temple tank. Large crowds gather to see this glittering procession. After the deity comes inside the temple it is taken on another elephant for 'Pallivetta' through the east nada. Men put on the guise of the boar or other wild animals and join in the hunting expedition. 'Pallivetta' is symbolic of the destruction of such evils as *kama, krodha* (desire, anger) etc. that plague us in the jungle of life.

The tenth and final day of the Utsavam is known as 'Aarattu', which means bathing the deity. On this day the procession starts at dusk and like the previous day it goes

round the temple and the tank. People all along the street greet the Lord with the traditional *Nirapara* or a measure of paddy and lighted bell-metal lamps. The deity is brought down to the temple tank in front of the Bhagawati temple. After special pujas, it is dipped in the holy water amidst the chanting of mantras. At this auspicious moment thousands of people also bathe along with the Lord chanting His name. The place is said to acquire the sanctity of Varanasi and Ganga and a bath at that time is therefore considered to be exceptionally purificatory, washing away one's sins committed during the previous year.

After the 'Aarattu' the 'uchcha' puja of the deity (actually on this day it takes place at night) is conducted at the Bhagawati temple. The Lord then returns to the *garbha griha* after eleven circumambulations executed at a fast pace. Thus the entire festival which starts with the elephant race also ends with it. The temple flag is now lowered.

Blessed are those who participate in this 'Brahmotsavam'. No wonder a great concourse gathers on the occasion to receive the blessings of Lord Guruvayurappan.

Two incidents connected with the utsavam are worth recalling:

A feature of the *aarattu puja* at Guruvayur is the bathing of the deity with tender coconut milk. The tender coconuts are provided by a particular family and there is a story about it.

Once a Nambudiri boy appeared at the gates of an

Ezhava (Ezhavas belong to the Scheduled castes) house and saying that "he" was extremely thirsty asked for two tender coconuts to be sent to the temple tank where the *aarattu* was being conducted. The Ezhava who was an ardent devotee of the Lord soon arrived at the eastern gate with the coconuts which were offered to the deity. He was overwhelmed by the Lord's gesture and could not restrain the tears of joy that welled in his eyes. How often God Himself goes to His devotees without invitation and in such mysterious ways?

Following this incident the house of the Ezhava hallowed by the visit of the Lord was named by devotees as Tampuran Patikkal (literally the gate sanctified by the Lord) and since then it has been the privilege of this Ezhava family to offer tender coconuts during the *aarattu*.*

The second incident took place in recent times, in 1942. Polpakara Manakkal Kunjan Nambudiripad had officiated as the head priest six or seven times. It was he who first started decorating the deity at dawn in the form of Balagopala, (this is referred to in the chapter on puja routine). How many thousands of devotees feast their eyes on this delightful child Krishna, with anklets, red loincloth, flute placed at the mouth and butter in hand!

After retiring from Guruvayur, Kunjan Nambudiripad settled at Mavelikkara near Alleppey. But every year he came to Guruvayur during the *utsavam* and observed bhajan for twelve days following the *aarattu*. In the year 1942 also he came as usual to his *illam* at Kumaranellore to perform

* "Sree Guruvayurappan" by Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri.

his father's *sraddha* (death anniversary). He, however, informed his friends at Guruvayur that he was not able to go over to witness the Utsavam as he was not too well. Yet on '*aarattu*' day he arrived at Guruvayur post-haste to the surprise of his friends.

He explained to them that the Lord appeared in his dream the previous night and said, "I have not forgotten the days you served me and decorated me for the delight of my devotees. Even if my *bhaktas* do not wish to have my darshan I do wish to see them during the *aarattu*." The erstwhile head priest was choked with emotion and was beside himself with joy. Such is the infinite mercy the Lord bestows on his devotees.*

*Ashtami Rohini*

Another important festive day at Guruvayur is Janmashtami, the day of Lord Krishna's birth. He was born under the Rohini nakshatra on the eighth day of the waning moon of Sravana. This falls in the month of Chingam (July-August). A 'niramaḷa' and a Vilakku on a grand scale are conducted as offering by the staff of the Devaswom. *Appam* (cakes made of rice paste and jaggery) is offered by devotees in abundance as it is considered the most favourite food for God on the day.

*Vishu*

The first of Metam (mid-April) known as Vishu, which in a way is New Year's Day for Malayalis, is also observed at Guruvayur. People of Kerala as a rule set their

* "Sree Guruvayurappan" by Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri.

eyes first thing on the morning of Vishu on auspicious articles arranged in front of the family deity. But, for the same purpose thousands prefer to go to Guruvayur to have the eye-filling darshan of the Lord. Vast milling crowds stay overnight in the Matilakam to fulfil their desire of having this rare darshan so that all may go well during the new year.

*Kuchela's Day*

This is observed on the first Wednesday of Dhanu (December-January) to commemorate Kuchela. He was a poverty-stricken Brahmin. One day when his wife could not stand the sight of their children crying out in hunger, she remembered that her husband and Sri Krishna had been classmates. So she suggested to him, "why don't you go and see your old friend? He will be of help". Reluctantly he agreed. He carried a small gift of beaten rice in the folds of his garment. At Dwaraka he was received affectionately by Sri Krishna. After exchanging the usual courtesies, Krishna asked him, "what have you brought me?" Kuchela did not reply—he was ashamed of the humble gift he was carrying with him. The Lord, who sees all, saw this, snatched the bundle of beaten rice, untied it and ate a handful with relish. The two friends recalled old incidents from their early school life. Thus Kuchela passed a night in the company of the Lord. In the ecstasy he forgot the purpose of his visit. And soon he took leave of his old friend. But on his return to his place Kuchela found to his surprise a palatial building in the very same spot where his humble hut had stood.

Was not the grace and blessing of the Lord who had partaken of his humble gift of beaten rice all too evident?

The Bhaktavatsala that He is, the Lord not only blessed Kuchela with wealth but also helped him attain moksha. It is to commemorate this episode that Kuchela Day is observed at Guruvayur. Needless to say that beaten rice is offered in abundance by devotees on this occasion.

*Festivals at the Bhagawati Temple*

The Navaratri festival, as the very name indicates, is observed for nine days. Trikala puja, recitals of *Lalita-Sahasranamam* (a thousand names of the Goddess) and *Narayaniyam,* display of lights around the temple are the special features observed during the celebrations.

Another occasion for celebration in this temple is the 'Talapoli' which comes in the month of Dhanu (December-January). In fact, this is a function which every Bhagawati shrine in Kerala conducts during this month. It is one-day celebration with the customary Kalamezhuthu (decorative design of the Devi on the floor), singing of devotional songs and procession. The expenses are met by public subscriptions.

*Krishnattam*

Of cultural programmes and religious discourses conducted at Guruvayur special mention must be made of the dance-drama known as Krishnattam—the dance of Krishna which is very popular. Krishnattam is based on the twelfth-century Bengali saint Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda* (Song of Govinda or Sri Krishna) which became a popular poetical work in Kerala some three hundred years ago. The Zamorin of Calicut named Manavadevan Thampuran, who used to manage the affairs of the Guruvayur temple, was fascinated

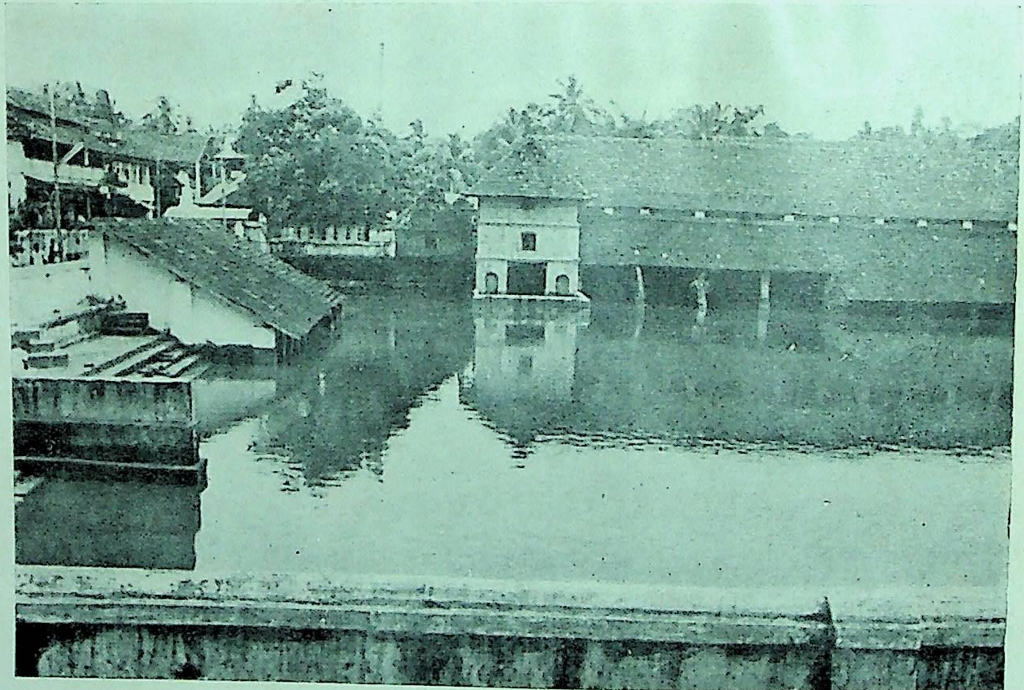
by this song and arranged for its recital in the temple every day. Some devoted Nambudiri Brahmins in Guruvayur inspired by its music conceived of a dance-drama based on it and rendered the whole poem in *abhinaya* (dramatic gestures).

Some scholars place the origin of Krishnattam in or about the fourteenth century. Irrespective of the date of adaptation of the *Gitagovinda* into dance-drama, the point of interest is that in the Krishnattam arose the special technique of presentation that came to be the characteristic expressional feature of the future Kathakali. In Krishnattam the actor was relieved of the necessity of narrating the story, and so set free to give his attention entirely to the elaborate work of bodily gesture (*abhinaya*) and hand-language (angya). The singing was entrusted to another participant who became the voice of the actor, a change that put upon the audience the extended imaginative task of unifying the two exponents of sound and sight into one mental and emotional entity.*

The costume and the general make-up have a close resemblance to Kathakali. It is said that once the Zamorin in his excessive devotion to Sri Krishna actually spotted Him playing near about the present Kuttambalam where there used to be an *Elanji* tree. As he ran up eagerly to the Boy to hold him in his hands, the Boy disappeared instantly. But in the process the Raja caught hold of a peacock feather adorning Krishna's hair. Tradition has it that it is the same feather which adorned the crown of the actor who played the role of Sri Krishna in Krishnattam, till recent times.

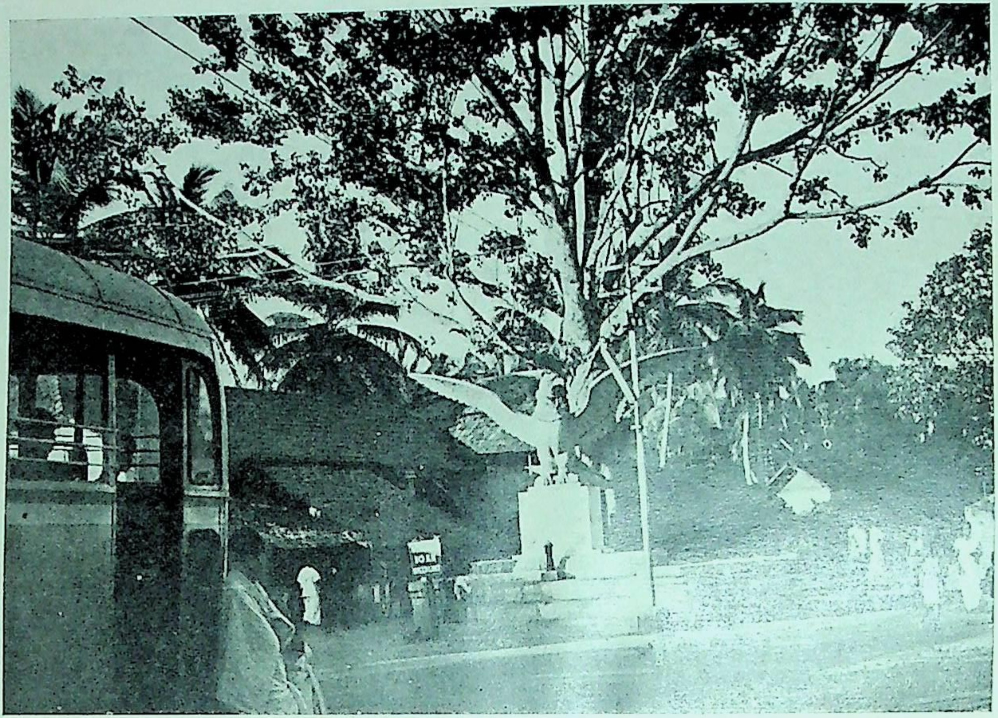
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* Dance-Drama and Shadow Play by J. H. Cousins. *The Arts & Crafts of Kerala,* Paico Publishing House.



*Rudratirtha—the temple tank.*

*Photo*: Bhavana Studio.

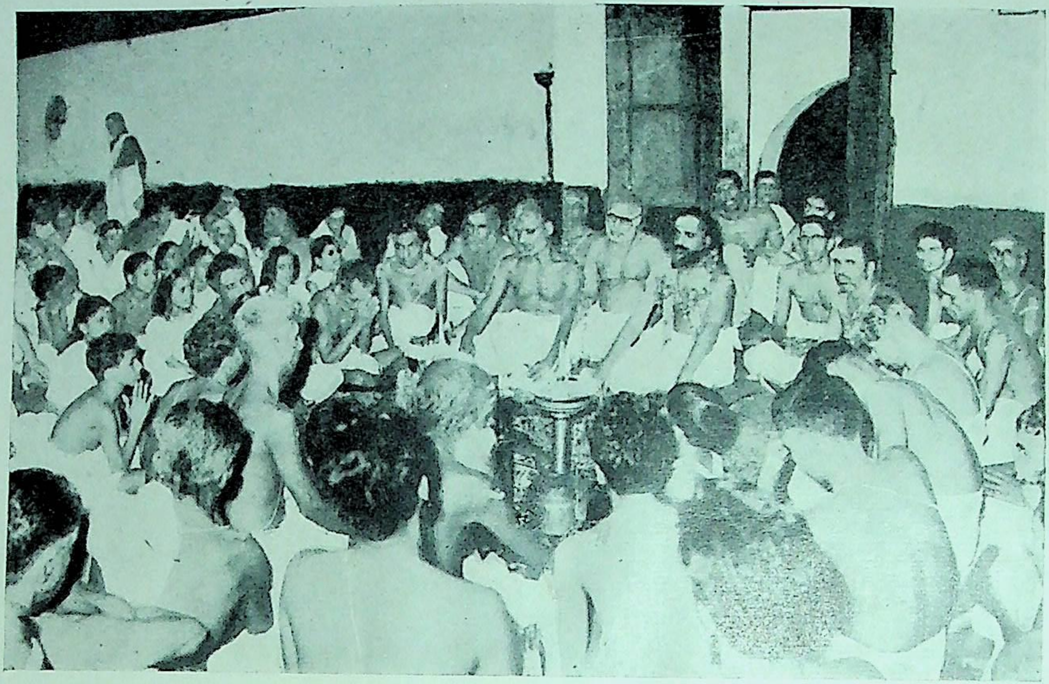


*Manjulal—the peepul tree hallowed by the memory of the harijan woman Manjula.*
*Photo:* Author.

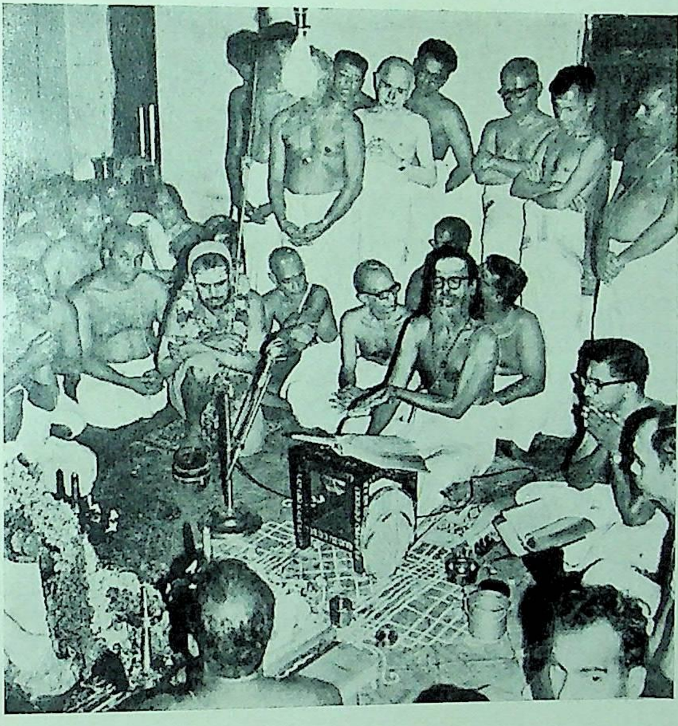


*The Shiveli—procession of the deity around the temple—is a feature of the elaborate pooja routine.*

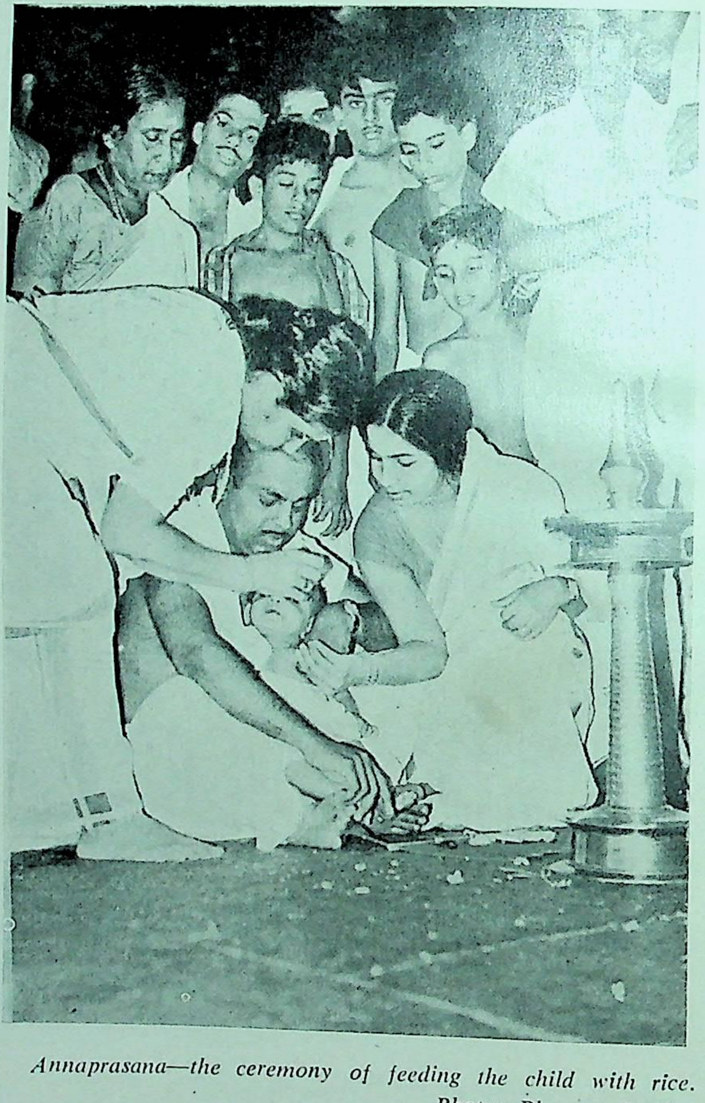
***Photo*****:** Bhavana Studio.



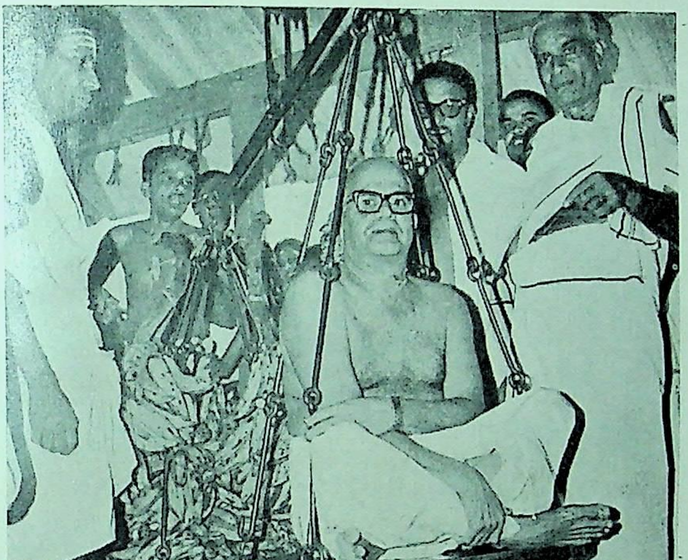
*Mass Narayana japa conducted daily at dusk.*
*Photo*: Courtesy Sri Guruvayurappan Sankeertana Trust.



*To Sri Guruvayurappan nothing is more pleasing than the recitation of Bhagavata. Sri Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri, a renowned exponent conducting a Saptah Yajna.*
*Photo*: Bhavana Studio.

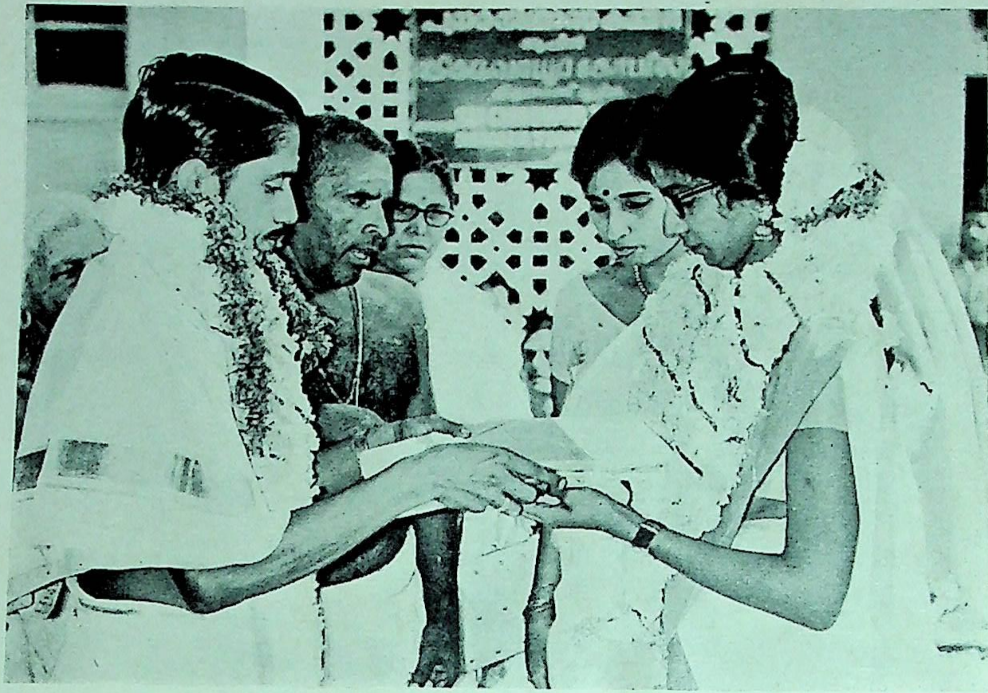


*Annaprasana—the ceremony of feeding the child with rice.*
*Photo*: Bhavana Studio.



*Tulabharam, a popular offering in which the person who undertakes the vow is weighed against certain articles (plantains in this case) which are given away to the deity.*

*Photo*: Bhavana Studio.



*Of late more and more marriages are being held in the temple. The groom is seen presenting a sari to the bride.*

*Photo:* Bhavana Studio.

The repertoire of Krishnattam consists of eight stories depicting the life of Sri Krishna from birth to his ascent to Vaikuntha: 'Avatara', 'Kaliyamardana', 'Rasakrida', 'Kamsa Vadha', 'Swayamvara', 'Banayuddha', Vivida Vadha' and 'Swargarohana'. Each story is enacted on a day, but since the last story is considered inauspicious, the 'avatara' is once again enacted on the ninth day.

The Zamorin who maintained the troupe used to inaugurate the play each year in his own palace at Calicut. Thereafter the artists went to Guruvayur and performed there for nine days consecutively. The troupe used to tour the Malabar district staging performances in the homes of well-to-do families before they returned to Calicut.

The Guruvayur Devaswom now maintains nearly 30 people connected with the staging of Krishnattam in the temple. Since witnessing Krishnattam is regarded as an act of piety, now-a-days devotees can offer this as a *vazhivadu* on payment of the prescribed amount. Devotees vow the enactment of 'avatara' for progeny, 'Swayamvara' for marriage and 'Banayuddha' for success in any pursuit in life. According to tradition the dance is staged on the northern side after the closure of the temple at night. It must be completed before the opening of the Srikoil at 3 A.M.

It is noteworthy that for many years Krishnattam was banned in the erstwhile States of Travancore and Cochin. Once when *Kamsa Vadham* (the slaying of Kamsa) was being enacted, a real elephant was kept on the stage with a view to testing the divinity claimed for Krishnattam. The animal represented Kamsa's Kuvalayapida which was set

upon Krishna and Balarama. The two boys who enacted the roles of the divine heroes were terror-stricken at the sight of the huge tusker. Their guru, however, blessed them, asked them not to lose courage and urged them on to play their roles. The boy who played Krishna plucked out the tusks of the elephant by the root along with the life of the animal as Lord Krishna Himself had done. It looked as though he would accomplish the next part of the drama—the slaying of Kamsa. The play was, therefore, stopped immediately.

*Kuttu*

Chakyar Kuttu is another ancient temple art performed during the festivals, particularly during the 'Mandalam' and 'Vaisakha' seasons. The performance takes place in the 'Kuttambalam' in the south-east corner of the temple. The chakyar is something of a mono-actor who also uses mime in telling a story.

He recites passages from the *Puranas* or from the *Ramayana, Mahabharata* or *Bhagavata* and explains the meaning in Malayalam. Humour and wit are the keynotes of this performance. In rendering the story with elaborate exposition the actor also provides a commentary on the men and events of the day. As Kuttu is essentially dominated by the comic spirit it is popular even today and attracts large crowds during festivals.

*Bhagavata Discourse*

Nowhere in India is the Bhagavata discourse given so much importance as in Guruvayur. Jagadguru Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham has indicated in an article

on temple worship that to Sri Guruvayurappan nothing is more pleasing than the recitation of the *Bhagavata* which explains why the *Bhagavata Saptaha yajna* is often conducted at Guruvayur. Sanskrit scholars and devotees like the late Bhakta Siromani Kunhikkavu Nambudiripad, Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiripad and Mekkat Neelakantan Nambudiripad are among the great expounders of this *puraná* who by their discourses used to make the atmosphere of Guruvayur surcharged with bhakti. At present, Sri Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri is a great exponent of the *Bhagavata* carrying on the tradition of these blessed souls, by conducting *Saptaha yajnas* not only at Guruvayur but other centres such as Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, and Jamshedpur. There are of course several other *bhaktas* who conduct the discourse at Guruvayur. They are Sarvashri Meledam Krishnan Nambudiri, Thattayur Unni Nambudiripad, Thottam Krishnan Nambudiri, Velinjil Damodaran Nambudiri and Ponnadukathu Sankaran Nambudiri, to mention a few.

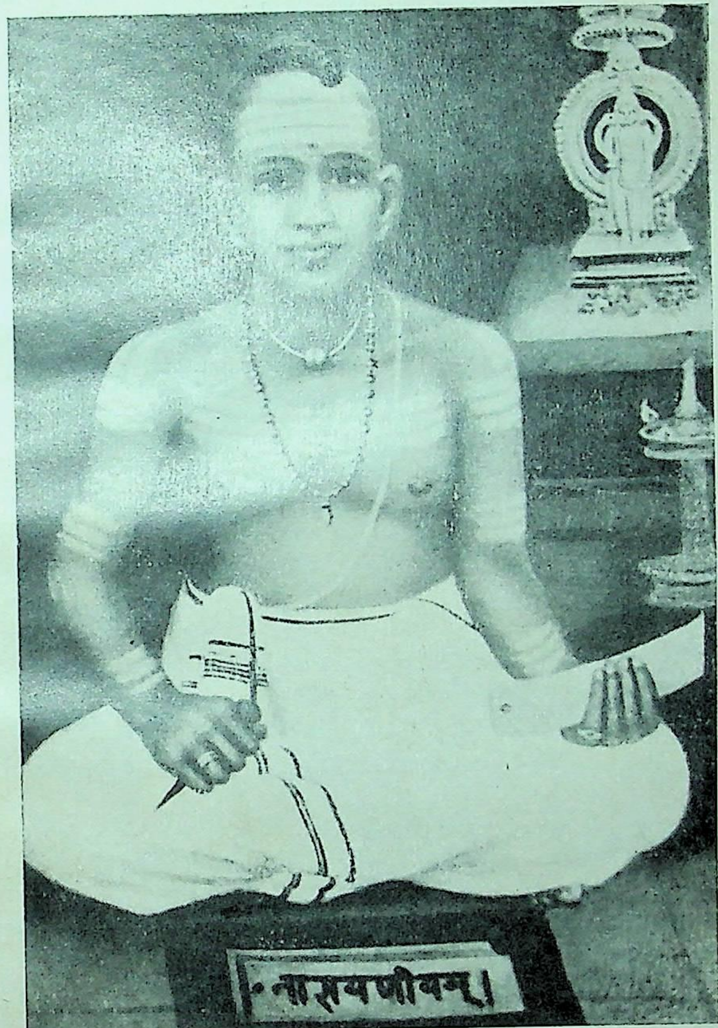
Recital of the *Narayaniyam* which is the *Bhagavata* in nutshell is also conducted regularly at the temple. Both these items can be presented as *vazhivadus.*

CHAPTER VII

## NARAYANIYAM—THE GOSPEL OF GURUVAYUR

There are several *mahatmyas,* literally, works describing the greatness or importance of a place or deity etc., legends and folk-tales extolling the glory of the Lord of Guruvayur. The *Narayaniyam,* the Gospel of Guruvayur, which identifies Guruvayurappan with Mahavishnu, the central figure of the *Bhagavata,* is the greatest of these mahatmyas, creating a Guruvayur in the heart of everyone who reads or listens to it. To the lakhs of devotees who come here on pilgrimage all round the year the very name *Narayaniyam* is a source of spiritual sustenance.

The author of this great work is Meppattur Narayana Bhattatiri, a 16th-century savant and poet of Kerala. He came of a Brahmin family of poets, philosophers, scholars and devotees belonging to South Malabar. He, however, had an erratic early life. He did not have formal education or training in the Vedas. As a youth he ran away from home and led a wayward, dissolute life. For a while he lived at Trikandiyur, near Tirur, where he lived on




*Meppatur Narayana Bhattatiripad, a 16th century savant and poet who composed the immortal 'Narayaniyam'—the gospel of Guruvayur.*

—from a traditional painting.

temple charity and had an affair with a girl belonging to a Pisharoti caste.

There was one Achyuta Pisharoti in her family who was an erudite scholar, poet, grammarian, astrologer, and above all a great bhakta. One day while he was engaged in his devotions, he saw the young Bhattatiri stepping out of the house most irreverently. This provoked him to reprimand the young man. He asked Bhattatiri why a high-born like him should be wasting his precious life in sensual pleasures. This had the desired effect on Bhattatiri who turned over a new leaf. He became a disciple of Pisharoti and learnt from him Sanskrit.

Bhattatiri's latent genius blossomed out in due course. He gained mastery over the Sanskrit classics, grammar, rhetoric, logic, etc. He also studied the Vedas and he became so learned as to gain the admiration of his master. From an irreverent sceptic in his teens he turned a great devotee of the Lord. He took to writing and produced a number of devotional booklets, *Prabandhas* and a celebrated work on Sanskrit grammar known as *Prakriyasarvasvam*.

While he was emerging into fame, his preceptor Pisharoti was stricken with rheumatism. Bhattatiri, by way of *Gurudakshina,* took upon himself by *avahana* (vicarious suffering) the disease from which his master was suffering. As a result Pisharoti was cured and his disciple contracted the fell disease. He tried every remedy known to man but in vain. At last he went to the Lord of Guruvayur, the Divine healer, for refuge.

There he composed more than a thousand slokas

(1,034, to be exact) in praise of Lord Guruvayurappan and recited them inside the temple. The *slokas*, divided into a hundred *dasakas* of about 10 each, contain the essence of *Srimad Bhagavatam*. They evoke the splendour of the ten *Avatara Lilas* (stories of Vishnu's incarnations). And almost every one of the one hundred *dasakas* ends with a prayer to the Lord of Guruvayur to cure the poet's malady. And cured he was by the grace of Guruvayurappan. Though apparently the aim of the *Narayaniyam* is the cure of the ills of the present birth, its hidden ultimate aim (like that of the *Bhagavata* on which it is based) is *moksha* or liberation from the cycle of death and birth. Thus the poet closes his last and hundredth *dasaka* with the words, "May this *Narayaniyam* give us here (in this world and now) itself *ayur arogya saukhyam*—longevity, health and happiness."

*Narayaniyam* is a masterly literary work testifying to the vast scholarship and devotion of its author. Being an epitome of the *Bhagavata purana* one derives the same benefit by reading it as the original itself. Without any effort the reader is led step by step towards His presence till he exclaims with Bhattatiri *Agre Pasyami* (Him I see before me), in the last dasaka. Here the poet gives an inspired and inspiring vision of the Sri Krishna that was finally revealed to him, starting from the dazzling halo of lustre gradually culminating into that lovely, full-fledged divine form.

A point to note about *Narayaniyam* is that the entire poetical work is in the form of an address to Lord Guruvayurappan. Besides, it won the seal of approval of the Lord Himself. It is not to be regarded as a conventional

*grantha* (book) but a divine nectar of the Lord's stories accepted and assented to (the assent being indicated by the nodding of the head) and set right by the Lord Himself with appropriate directions wherever necessary. There are many instances of such divine guidance to the poet during the course of this work, some of which are recounted here.

To begin with, the inspiration for launching this immortal work itself came to Meppattur from those two lines from the *Bharatam* written by the great devotee and poet Thunjath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan:

"Oh! Queen of Parrots! Thou art the garland mounted with crown, worn by she-parrots. Oh! Do tell me, Do tell me, the nectar of the divine lilas of Lord Krishna."

When Meppattur requested Ezhuthachan to suggest a remedy for his disease, the latter was so deeply immersed in the joy of chanting the divine names of Lord Hari that he said cryptically: "Begin with fish and eat it". The meaning of this strange advice was not lost upon Bhattatiri: he rightly understood it as an order to compose a poetical work on the *avataras* of Vishnu beginning with that of Matsya (Fish).

While dealing with the incarnation of Narasimha, Bhattatiri was at a loss to describe the shape of the man-lion form. It is said that the Lord then sprang up from one of the pillars of the Vatilamatam as Narasimha and revealed himself to the poet.

Again, while telling the story of Rama, he was narrating the episode of Hanuman returning from Lanka after locating Sita and handing over to Rama her *chudamani* or

hair ornament. He wrote "*Mauliratnam dadau*", ('gave the head ornament to') and then wondered to whom it was given. Of course he knew that the jewel was given to Rama but the poetic metre did not allow the extra word of 'Rama' which contains two syllables. He found himself lost in thought when Lord Guruvayurappan stretched his arm towards Meppattur indicating that the jewel was given to Lord Guruvayurappan Himself. The poet at once inserted the monosyllabic word, "tey" meaning "to you" and completed the stanza.

This incidentally shows that Rama and Guruvayurappan are one and the same. But wait....while describing the exile of Sita (she was then pregnant) in the forest Meppattur disapproves of the Lord's act, exclaiming "Alas! Siva! Siva! *Thou* didst such an injustice!" Thereupon Lord Guruvayurappan says: "It was done by Rama, not by me".

Now coming to the story of Krishna Himself, Meppattur describes how Yasoda is annoyed with the Child Krishna breaking curd-pots and binds Him with a rope and fastens it around a mortar. In doing so Bhattatiri says that the curd-pot was broken by Krishna with the churning rod while in the *Bhagavata* the instrument used was given as a grinding stone. Meppattur realising the error was pained that he went against the authentic text of the sage Vyasa. But he was at once relieved when the Lord announced: "I did break the pot both with the churning stick and the grinding stone."*

All these incidents show that while composing the

* "Lord Guruvayurappan and Narayaniyam Day", Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri, *Bhavan's Journal*, December 13, 1970.

verses, Meppattur felt the Lord's presence throughout. Indeed the *Narayaniyam* is *Guruvayurappan* speaking through Bhattatiri. Just as his rheumatism began to subside as he began his work, even today when doctors and medicines fail, the recital of the *Narayaniyam* is a remedy for incurable diseases as well as a means of attaining salvation.

*Bhattatiri and Poontanam*

For all the erudition you see in his *Narayaniyam*, Meppattur did, however, make some mistakes in his work and learnt a bitter lesson of his life.

In contrast with him there was Poontanam Nambudiri, a humble devotee of Lord Guruvayurappan. He had no formal education. In his daily *parayana* of the *Bhagavatam* or of chanting of the thousand names of the Lord he mispronounced many words. Once Bhattatiri laughed when he heard him utter the word Amaraprabhu (Lord of the Devas) as "Maraprabhu" (in Malayalam it would mean Lord of the trees). An incorporeal voice was now heard saying: "The Lord is Amaraprabhu, Maraprabhu and indeed Sarvaprabhu (Lord of everything)."

Still the proud Bhattatiri would not learn the lesson of humility. Poontanam wrote a Malayalam lyric in praise of the Lord. Called *Jnanappana* or Song of Wisdom, the work is noted for its simplicity, force of diction and devotional fervour. Being however diffident, he wanted Bhattatiri to go through it and have his blessings.

But Bhattatiri had no patience with a book written in mere Malayalam (then considered vernacular). In contempt, he said to Poontanam that he had better study

*vibhakti* (declension) first since God did not hearken to anything but Sanskrit! Poor Poontanam was crest-fallen and cursed himself for not mastering Sanskrit. He went home and wept bitterly before Guruvayurappan for not being able to sing his glory in Sanskrit. The Lord was moved by his heart-rending prayer. He took the form of a Brahmachari and proceeded to Bhattatiri's house the same night. Bhattatiri had just returned from the temple and was preparing himself to recite his own glorious piece, *Narayaniyam,* when he saw the stranger. He could at once sense something divine in the boy and after greeting him offered him a seat by his side as he recited '*Narayaniyam*', beginning with "*Sandranandava*...." The boy was quick to point out a mistake in the very first verse and explained the fault to the startled Bhattatiri, by referring him to the *Kavyaprakasa.*

Bhattatiri admitted his mistake. But when he had recited the second verse, lo, two mistakes were pointed out by the visitor. The proud Bhattatiri lost his nerve and began to perspire as he resumed his recitation. In the third verse there were three mistakes, four in the fourth and so on....After the tenth *sloka* Bhattatiri's eyes opened. He realised the Lord in the boy who had told him that Poontanam's *bhakti* (devotion) was more pleasing to Him than Bhattatiri's *vibhakti* (meaning grammar or erudition).

Bhattatiri rushed up to Poontanam and, falling at his feet, begged for his forgiveness. He sought a copy of *Jnanappana* with a view to correcting its mistakes. But when he read it, he found it flawless, to his utter surprise. He even incorporated one or two ideas from the book in his own *magnum opus.*

Thus the Lord made Bhattatiri cast off the ego that still tainted his soul and showed the world that *bhakti* alone is the path of salvation and not *vibhakti*.

There is one more incident in Bhattatiri's life to show that whenever a *bhakta's* mind is tinged with pride, the Lord, out of His infinite mercy, sees that it is erased. Once Meppattur went to the well-known Mookkola temple to worship the goddess there. It was some years after he had composed his *Narayaniyam* and he was a little proud in having been able to produce a masterly summary of *Bhagavata*. An *apadachudam** description of the Mookkola Goddess was thus child's play for him and this he began to do. But even after composing full seventy stanzas he found that he had not progressed far from describing the divine feet and that he could proceed no further. It was then that he realised that he could by himself accomplish little and that whatever he had achieved was due to God's blessings alone.

His pride thus vanquished, he remained at Mookkola for many days praying to the goddess. One day a celestial vehicle appeared. And within moments it ascended into the skies carrying Meppattur to Vaikunta. Even today devotees worship the sacred spot whence Meppattur made his departure to the heavens.

It is said that Meppattur dedicated his *Narayaniyam* to Sri Guruvayurappan on the 28th of Vrischikam. This day is celebrated as "*Narayaniya Dinam*" at Guruvayur.

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* Literally 'foot to head'.

CHAPTER VIII

# LILAS OF LORD GURUVAYURAPPAN

The glory of Guruvayurappan has spread far and wide as a deity who answers the prayers of his devotees. The Lord said to Arjuna in the *Gita*: "I am responsible for the welfare of those who think of me to the exclusion of all else and who remain devoted to me all the time." Thus it is that Lord Guruvayurappan comes to the rescue of his *bhaktas* in distress and manifests His grace in infinite and inscrutable ways. Recounted here are incidents that should lift the hearts of the sick, the depressed and the helpless.

## *The Lord as Divine Healer*

The story of King Janamejaya being cured of leprosy has been narrated in detail in Chapter II. This and the legend of the Pandyan ruler narrated in the Chapter on Temple Architecture illustrate the popular belief that by the grace of this deity the sick and the afflicted are restored to health and happiness.

The context in which the famous *Narayaniyam* came to be written and how the author Meppatur Narayana Bhattatiri was completely cured of his ailment has also been narrated in the previous chapter.

There was another Nambudiri, a staunch devotee, who was suffering from acute paralysis. He had become such a cripple that he had to be carried always in an *uri,* the network suspended from a beam or rafter to hold curd-pots and other domestic utensils. Hence he came to be called *uriyamatham,* his *matham* or dwelling place virtually being an *uri.* After the doctors had given up all hope he vowed a substantial offering to the Lord of Guruvayur if he were cured. And thus he came to Guruvayur for bhajan, with his purse bulging with its contents meant for the offering.

At the same time another man had come to Guruvayur. He was abjectly poor and hoped he could gain prosperity by propitiating the deity. One day Uriyamatham went to the Rudratirtha for his morning ablutions. Placing the purse on the topmost step he caused himself to be lowered into the water for a dip. The poor man in search of wealth happened to be by the tank. He saw Uriyamatham's purse and wasted no time in swooping down on it. And within moments he was off with his booty. Uriyamatham who saw the theft leapt out of his *uri* and, clearing three or four steps a bound, gave chase to the thief, without realising how miraculously he had been cured. Just then he heard an incorporeal voice saying: "Be content; thy prayers are granted; so also his!"

One Kunhianujathi Thampuratti of the Zamorin's

family was brought to Guruvayur in 1890. She was past eighty and was suffering from rheumatism. She had been confined to bed for many years as a hopeless case. As a last resort she was brought to Guruvayur. Every day, early in the morning her attendants would dip her in the Rudra-tirtha and carry her round the temple on the shoulders. On the tenth day, she is said to have walked by herself, doing the circumambulation without any help.

A sannyasin called Taikkad Swamiyar was a victim of scrofula. His devotion to the Lord took the form of serving his devotees. In fact he had a dream that he should daily help in serving food offered to the Brahmins in the temple. He did this and observed bhajan for a few months as a result of which he was cured of his disease. The eastern Vilakkumatam or gallery of little lamps, outside the *Nalambalam*, which no visitor to Guruvayur can miss, is his grateful offering to the Divine Healer.

Even in this modern age when medical science is so much advanced the number of devotees who get cured of their bodily ills by the grace of Lord Guruvayurappan is legion.

To mention some notable examples. The well-known saint and scholar, Upanyasa Chakravarti, the late Sengalipuram Anantharama Dikshitar was cured of his leprosy by praying to Sri Guruvayurappan. It was more than thirty years ago that the Dikshitar visited Guruvayur for the first time. His disease was in such an advanced stage that he had to cover his entire body. The watchman at the temple tank did not allow him to take his bath. Three or four

years later it was a different Dikshitar who came to pray before the deity to the amazement of everyone. The miracle was wrought by the fervent recitation of the *Narayaniyam.*

Later, through his learned commentary on this immortal work and his popular religious discourses, Dikshitar did much to spread the glory of Guruvayurappan. Whether the discourse was on the *Ramayana,* or the *Mahabharata* or the *Bhagavata* he would eventually lead his listeners' minds to Lord Guruvayurappan. Today if hundreds of thousands of devotees from the neighbouring states of Kerala, nay, from distant corners of India, flock to Guruvayur seeking the infinite mercy of the Lord, it is in no small measure due to the inspiring talks given by Dikshitar. If Narayana Bhattatiri composed the *Narayaniyam,* it was Dikshitar who spread the message of surrender to the Lord among millions of people.

A few years ago, during one of his discourses in Madras, a devotee from Guruvayur reminded Dikshitar that the stock of rice meant for the daily *naivedyam* at the temple was fast dwindling. The Upanyasa Chakravarti was greatly concerned and told the audience that neglect of the needs of the Lord of Guruvayur would spell disaster for the world and appealed to them to come forward with contributions. Thanks to his plea, the Tamil Nadu Government soon sanctioned the rice required for Guruvayur.

Hundreds of years ago it was a Pandyan king who built the Guruvayur temple. Today it is the same Tamil Nadu people who supply rice for the *naivedyam* of the Lord.

Another beneficiary of Guruvayurappan's grace is Sri Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar, the Grand Old man of Carnatic music. Some years ago he lost his voice and regained it by His Grace. Here is an account by Chembai himself:

"On January 7, 1952, I was giving a concert at holy Suchindram. An hour had elapsed and I was at the peak of my performance. All of a sudden, my vocal chords got stuck up, as it were, and my voice totally failed me. The concert broke up in confusion. Many rushed up to the dais to render help. Doctors tried their best with pills and potions but to no avail.

"I went through life without any hope and no ray of hope seemed to come from anywhere.

"In this state of desperation, in 1954, on the great Ekadasi Day in Guruvayur, I stood before the Lord and wrung out my heart to Him. I could not give vocal utterance to my anguish. Memories of the glorious days when I had sung His praises surged forward.

"O Lord, I cried out, will Thou not let me sing Thy praises? Will Thou let my heart break, for without this outward expression of my heart's agony, I can hardly live? Hadst Thou in the past not given the gift of speech to the great Muka Kavi? Had he not sung Thy praises in enchanting Sanskrit verses known so well as the *Muka Panchasati Stotras?*

"In my agony and mute supplication to the Lord, I

had not noticed a Nambudiri standing at a distance of some fifty feet from me. He divined my trouble and came to me. He had evidently heard my inarticulate prayer. He promised to rid me of my trouble, Guruvayurappan willing.

"The Lord had sent his minister to help me. I was cured of the defect. In keeping with my promise I have since that day been singing the praises of the Lord and dedicating all that I get therefrom for the worship of Guruvayurappan. Every year, I have the *'Udayastamana'* *puja* of the Lord performed and the sum of five thousand for this comes from the concerts that the Lord himself arranges. Despite my infirmities at the age of 75 and the consequent inability to sing as of old, I am still blessed to perform concerts."*

Like the Haridasas of old Karnataka, Sri Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri is a great devotee of Lord Guruvayurappan. He was a non-believer till the age of 20, when he reluctantly went to Guruvayur with his uncle who was then the Head Priest of the temple. He was then suffering from a chronic stomach complaint. After taking the Lord's *prasadams* for a few days his stomach complaint vanished; and convinced of divine presence at Guruvayur he stayed on there to become a great *bhakta* of the deity there. For the last 25 years he has been conducting daily mass *Narayana Japa* at the Guruvayur temple at dusk, with large number of devotees participating. Sri Anjam has also been giving discourses on the *Bhagavata,* known as *'Bhagavata Saptaha*

* Reproduced by courtesy from *Bhavan's Journal,* December 13, 1970.

*Yajnas*' in cities like Bombay, Madras, Calcuta and Jamshedpur, where he holds vast audiences spell-bound by his moving exposition of the great *purana*. He has had no regular schooling, yet he is a scholar in Sanskrit and Malayalam. Author of a number of books, he says that his only qualification is that he belongs to Guruvayur and to the Lotus Feet of its presiding deity.

*Bilvamangalam and Kururamma*

Bilvamangalam and Kururamma were two blessed souls who had visions of the Lord. While Bilvamangalam could see Him in the form in which he wished to see him, Kururamma, who was childless, had the Lord for her son. She lived with Him, played with Him and even scolded Him When He became naughty. The Boy in turn helped the old lady in her household chores and did her every service that a son would for his aged mother. Though Bilvamangalam was a Sanyasin, there still remained in him a sense of egoism. There are many stories to show how the Lord cured him of it and how He was partial to Kururamma who with her unstinted devotion, not only worshipped the Lord but also His *bhaktas*.

Bilvamangalam used to have the vision of the Lord in all His glory every day at the end of his worship. One day the Lord appeared before him later than usual. He was found smeared all over with grime. Questioned by Bilvamangalam on this Krishna explained that He had been held up by Mother (Kururamma) who had clapped Him in a kuntli (water pot) since He had been up to some mischief. He pointed to the soot on his body as proof.

On another occasion, Kururamma who held Bilvamangalam in high esteem invited him for bhiksha (for alms)*. With the help of Unnikrishnan Himself,—that was what she called the Lord—she prepared an elaborate meal for the august visitor and was eagerly awaiting his arrival. She waited the whole day and the night, without taking any food herself, but the sanyasin did not come. As for Bilvamangalam he forgot all about his engagement since he was engrossed in the worship of the Lord. It was when his beloved Krishna did not appear before him next morning when he went about crying for Him that he heard an incorporeal voice reminding him how he had caused agony to Kururamma by disappointing her the previous day. He hurried to her house full of remorse and made ample amends by accepting her hospitality.

On another occasion, an old Brahmin, suffering from acute stomach-ache, approached Bilvamangalam for a remedy. In a moment of impatience, Bilvamangalam sent him away with the curt words: "This is due to your past karma. Expiate the same by suffering; there is no other way." On his way back the disappointed brahmin was accosted by an old woman who, seeing his hungry look offered him food. The Brahmin, suffering as he was from stomach-ache, ate the sumptuous meal hesitantly. But, lo! from the very moment he took the first morsel he was cured of his stomach ailment and he became hale and hearty. The woman who offered him hospitality was none other than Kururamma. Bilvamangalam who heard about this later was once again repentant and was purged of his pride.

* Literally for alms, but in practice it means much more. Often the sannyasins are sumptuously fed.

### *The Lord and the little priest*

Once a little Nambudiri boy from Nenmeni Illam (house) had to officiate as the temple priest in place of his father who had gone to a friend's house to attend a *sraddha* ceremony. The boy in all his innocence believed that the deity would actually partake of the *naivedyam* offered merely as a ritual. He placed the cooked rice before the Lord and when He did not touch it in spite of all his entreaties, and even threats, he thought the Lord was averse to eating the *naivedyam* without buttermilk and mango pickles. So he brought these from a neighbouring *illam* and placed them before the Lord. As the Lord still did not respond physically to the invitation, the boy said, sobbing, that his father would punish him, if the *naivedyam* was found untouched by Him. The Lord now relented and ate the entire *naivedyam.*

With great joy, the little priest placed the empty vessel before the Variyar attendant to have it cleaned. The latter whose perquisite it was to have the entire *naivedyam*, flared up at the boy thinking that he had eaten all of it. He waited for the boy's father to return and complained to him about his son. The father went into a rage and raised his hand to slap the son when an incorporeal voice was heard from the Srikoil: "The boy is innocent; I am the guilty one; not the unni (boy)".

### *How the Lord saved His Devotees*

As referred to in the previous chapter, Poontanam Nambudiri, who hailed from Angadipuram, about 35 miles from Guruvayur, was a humble but staunch devotee of Lord

Guruvayurappan. He lived up to the age of 94 and till his eighty-fourth year, he used to go to Guruvayur for his *Tinkal* or monthly bhajan. The route from Angadipuram to Guruvayur lay across a forest infested with robbers.

One day Poontanam started later than usual and by sunset he found he had still six miles to go. On the perilous path he sought courage from chanting of the Lord's name and singing verses from *Narayaniyam*. Nevertheless he was waylaid by robbers. The only valuable thing on him was a ring he wore on his finger. This the ruffians removed by force and beat him up. Poor Poontanam fell on his feet giving himself up to the Lord's—his beloved Guruvayurappan's—care. In a flash he saw Draupadi praying to Lord Krishna to save her from the wicked Dussasana disrobing her in the open assembly of the Kauravas. He saw Gajendra offering flowers at His feet to save him from the jaws of the crocodile. And Poontanam also found himself praying to the Lord to rescue him from the robbers. And rescued he was! How? As he was praying to Guruvayurappan, the sound of a galloping horse was heard and there appeared on the scene a party of the Zamorin's soldiers, commanded by Mangat Achan. Seeing this, the robbers took to their heels leaving the ring, and Poontanam fell at his saviour's feet. As a token of gratitude he offered the commander the ring, which he reluctantly accepted.

Next morning when Poontanam went to have his beloved Lord's darshan at Guruvayur, the Melshanti handed over to him a ring which was the same one he had handed over the previous night to the Zamorin's commander. The mystery became clear to Poontanam in no time. The com-

mander was none other than the Lord Guruvayurappan Himself come to save His poor devotee's life. Tears of grateful joy rolled down Poontanam's cheeks as he fell prostrate before the Lord.

A similar incident that took place in recent times concerns a doctor and his wife who undertook the journey by train to Guruvayur via Trichur to fulfil a vow. When they got down at Trichur it was too late and they missed the last bus to Guruvayur. But they were so eager to have the early morning darshan that they hired a cart to Guruvayur.

After they had gone half way up, the driver drove them to an isolated place and stopped the cart. Soon the cartman was joined by others who demanded the jewels and the cash the couple were carrying. Just then a taxi appeared as if from nowhere with its blinding headlights. The ruffians ran away and the taximan drove with the couple to Guruvayur. The grateful doctor presented the taxi driver with a valuable ring in appreciation of the timely help. Next day they took their bath and went for the morning darshan. Imagine their surprise when they found the ring they had given to the taximan at the feet of Lord Guruvayurappan.

Once a farmer who had planted coconut palms offered the first crop to Lord Guruvayurappan. As the trees started yielding fruit, true to his promise, the farmer packed the nuts in jute bags and carted them to Guruvayur. On the way, a band of robbers set upon him and tried to snatch away the bags. When the farmer pleaded that they were meant for Lord Guruvayurappan the robbers retorted:

"What is there special about it, if they belong to Guruvayurappan? Do they grow horns?"

So saying they lifted the bags from the cart and scattered the contents on the road. To their consternation and surprise they found that the coconuts indeed did have horns! Needless to say they let the farmer continue his journey to Guruvayur with the coconuts.

A young man, Sankaran, suffered many hardships. He went from place to place in search of a job and eventually became a cook for a family in Coimbatore. During the three years he spent there he happened to visit Guruvayur with a householder. This proved a turning point in the life of Sankaran, who was till then a non-believer. He began chanting the Lord's name and reciting the *Narayaniyam* regularly. Later he enrolled himself in the Army. Guruvayurappan was his sole refuge wherever he was posted and in whatever capacity he worked.

Early in 1962, he was posted as a Signaller at an Indian outpost near Manasarovar. He was enchanted by the beauty and grandeur of the sacred place. In November that year, when the Chinese army laid siege to the area, Sankaran found himself separated from all his colleagues. His supplies ran out and he had not even a drop of water to drink. In the extreme cold he lay almost frozen and unconscious, but his lips mumbled "Guruvayurappa!," "Narayana!". It seemed the Lord responded to his prayers. Three Indian jawans appeared from nowhere, lifted him up and fed him with hot porridge. Refreshed, he woke up and followed them. As they reached safety, the three men disappeared.

Sankaran wondered at the mercy of the Lord who came in the guise of the soldiers to save him. He then remembered the Malayalam verse of Tunchan, the poet-philosopher of Kerala:

*"Hari Jagannathan paran Narayanan*
*arikil undallo tunayayi eppozhum".*

[When everyone abandons you there is Hari, the Lord of the Universe, and Narayana always by your side].

*How repetition of Lord's name saved the devotees*

As mentioned earlier, Mallisseri was one of the trustees of the temple. One day a certain devotee had wanted a feast to be held for the Lord with a hundred measures of rice. In Guruvayur the offering intended for the Lord is to be prepared by the two Kizhusantis or assistant priests. Unfortunately on the day one of them was on leave. Mallisseri was wondering how he would arrange the feast. He spent a sleepless night thinking it over and praying to the Lord to help him out of the predicament. "Thou alone art my refuge, no other!" he cried out.

At day break he went to the temple with halting steps. He looked around and saw to his joy that the Kizhusanti who had been on leave, had returned and preparations were going on for the feast. By ten o'clock it was all ready and the Kizhusanti went to the Rudratirtha for a dip. But he did not return to receive the extra remuneration he was entitled to. The amount was therefore credited to the "private account of the Lord." As the Kizhusanti did not turn up the next day also, Mallisseri sent his men to look for

him. He was traced to his own illam where he had been confined to bed ever since he had been on leave. Mallisseri could not but conclude that the Lord himself had come as the Kizhusanti in answer to his prayers and helped him out of the difficulty.

A mother and her children spent many sleepless nights as some legal proceedings were pending against her. The evidence and arguments were well matched and both sides were represented by equally able advocates. But there was every possibility of the court passing orders against her. Her only refuge lay in the Lord. And she appealed to Him by repeating His sacred name some fifteen lakhs of times; in other words, she had made fifteen lakhs of calls on Him to help her. Small wonder, the court's orders turned out to be in her favour.*

A creditor purchased his debtor's house in a court auction. If he insisted on his right to take possession of the house the debtor and his family would be in the streets. In utter despair the debtor sought the advice of a friend of his. All that the latter could do was to tell him that the Lord alone could help. For seven days and nights the debtor and his wife prayed to Lord Guruvayurappan. On the eighth day he went to the creditor. The doors were closed and no one seemed to be around. In despair he beat his breast exclaiming: "O Lord, why hast thou forsaken me?" Right then the doors opened. The creditor came out and gave a sympathetic hearing to what he had to say. The result: he agreed to forgo his right to take possession of the house.

* This and the following six incidents have been adapted from *Glory of Guruvayur* by K. V. Krishna Ayyar, M.A.L.T., *Kalyanakalpataru*, October 1964.

How a wife's confinement was postponed to an auspicious month is another proof of the Lord's unfailing grace. The woman in question was to have had her confinement in the month of Dhanus (December-January) which is considered inauspicious in Kerala. The woman and her husband were very much worried over the matter and consulted a friend. He advised them to keep their trust on Guruvayurappan. He also wrote out a mantra invoking the Lord. Thanks to their prayers, the confinement took place on the sixth day of the following month i.e. Makara, (latter half of January).

In another case the Lord's help was sought in making a safe child birth. It happened as recently as in 1960. The mother who was six months pregnant had been advised by a leading obstetrician of Bombay that since hers was a difficult case her confinement should take place in a well-equipped maternity hospital. Subsequently, as per custom she went to her native place for confinement. There their family doctor who was also a well-known obstetrician made arrangements for her delivery in a reputed hospital. But the lady was still anxious and on the advice of a friend turned to Guruvayurappan for help. She kept on writing the sacred name 'Narayana' until it became physically impossible for her to do so.

When the labour pains started it was night and there was thunder-storm. None of her relatives could stir out to fetch the family doctor. It was not till morning that a messenger could be sent to him. But the doctor was not at home; he had gone to Guruvayur! Nevertheless, by the

grace of Lord Guruvayurappan, the delivery took place at home itself and it was safe and normal, with only a midwife to assist.

Some time in 1940, a three-year old girl of Ootacamund had a severe attack of poliomyelitis. All sorts of treatment were tried but to no purpose. One day, as a last resort, the dejected parents brought the girl to a popular physician of Coimbatore (Dr. Madhavan Nayar). The doctor examined the child and said that there was hardly any hope for its recovery. But he was an ardent devotee of Guruvayurappan and he did not want to send away the parents in despair. He told them that he would begin the treatment after they had undertaken forty-day bhajan to Guruvayurappan. Every day before a lighted lamp, keeping the child on the lap, they would repeat the holy name of 'Narayana' a thousand times morning and evening. On the thirty-fifth day the child got up and walked!

They came to the doctor to express their joy and gratitude with a bagful of money. The doctor who saw the child playing in his garden outside could not believe his eyes. He remained speechless and overwhelmed by this demonstration of the Lord's Grace. He declined the money and advised the couple to go to Guruvayur and place it before the Divine Healer.

Here is another true story in which the same Coimbatore doctor figures. One night he gave the wrong pills to a patient from a nearby village suffering from stomach ache. It was too late when he realised to his horror that the pills contained enough poison to kill the patient. Messengers

were sent in search of the patient but without success. The doctor was in jitters—for three days and nights he prayed to Guruvayurappan. On the fourth day the villager presented himself before the doctor to report that the very first pill had cured him.

Yet another instance of Lord's grace has been narrated by this doctor. While in his teens he used to go to Guruvayur every day for the *nirmalya darshan*. When he came out after the worship, he would give some flowers and sandal-paste to a leper sitting outside. One day the leper was not to be seen. Five years passed and the doctor saw him again at Guruvayur. But there was not a trace of the fell disease on his body. The one-time leper explained that one day, while at Guruvayur he seemed to hear a voice asking him to go to Vaikom. Believing it to be the Lord's command he proceeded there and performed bhajan and was eventually cured. He was thus twice blessed, by Guruvayurappan and Vaikattappan (Lord Siva of Vaikom). He believed that it was the prasadam of Guruvayurappan which he used to receive at the doctor's hands that brought about the miracle.

Vedambal, daughter of Siva Iyer, was living in Delhi with her parents. In 1961, having passed her S.S.C. examination, she was hopeful of a bright future when all of a sudden a bout of typhoid left her mute. Many ENT specialists were consulted but they could do nothing.

Firm in the belief that Guruvayurappan would not forsake them, the girl and her parents decided to undertake

a 41-day bhajan. They arrived at Guruvayur early in June the same year and began their worship.

One day, a *bhakta* advised the girl to practise *nama japa* in her mind and listen to the Bhagavata discourse. This she religiously did. She was not in a fit condition to take the customary early morning bath and accompany her parents to the temple for the *nirmalya darshan*. She would however get up with them, wash her face and legs, light a lamp before a picture of Guruvayurappan and mentally chant the Lord's name and various *stotras*.

On June 26, the family woke up as usual and the parents prepared themselves to go to the temple. Suddenly they heard Vedambal utter, "Narayana", Narayana". She soon got up and told the awe-stricken parents, "I am also coming to the temple."

मूकं करोति वाचालं
पङ्गुं लङ्घयते गिरिम् ।
यत्कृपा तमहं वन्दे
परमानन्दमाधवम् ।।

[I salute that Madhava, the Source of Supreme Bliss whose grace makes the dumb eloquent and the cripple cross the mountains.]

The efficacy of *nama japa* is illustrated by another incident which took place some 25 years ago. The son of a Pattukaran of Guruvayur participated in the daily *nama japa* conducted there, even as a lad. In course of time he became a steadfast devotee of the Lord. One day as a

college student, he was escorting his sister from Ettumanoor (near Kottayam) to Guruvayur. Part of the journey was covered by boat through the backwaters. It was midnight and the weather was stormy. At midnight the boat developed trouble and was about to sink. The occupants cried in panic but the boy and his sister constantly chanted the Lord's names.

Finally, as the boat was going down, they felt some one pulling them out of a window and throwing them in the water. Then they became unconscious. Hours later, when they came to senses, they were safe on the shore. The people who had collected told them the story of how all other passengers had been drowned and they alone had been rescued by a fisherman.

The very night the boy saw the Lord telling him in a dream: "It was I who came as a fisherman and rescued you." The boy then realised the truth of what Krishna had said in the *Bhagavata*:

*Hari smriti sarva vipadvimokshanam*

[Those who remember the Lord Hari—Guruvayurappan—will be saved from all kinds of danger.]

*How the Lord helped the poor*

There was a poor but contented woman who was a steadfast devotee of Lord Guruvayurappan. She was unhappy that she had nothing to offer the Lord except her '*tali*' or '*mangalasutra*'. For a woman there is nothing more inauspicious than removing the *tali* even if it is to be

given away to the Lord. But she did so as her love of Guruvayurappan transcended every other consideration. But as she left the temple she found her *tali* intact around her neck. She returned, placed it again in front of the deity and left. To her surprise she found the *tali* again on her neck. Thinking that the Lord was not satisfied with her meagre offering she returned to Him for the third time and cried out saying that besides her *mangalasutra* she had only her heart to offer to the Lord. Just then a voice was heard from inside that the Lord was pleased with her whole-hearted devotion and she could take back her *tali*. As she returned home she found, like Kuchela, that she had been blessed with unexpected wealth.

A Harijan woman called Manjula used to come to Guruvayur regularly for her *Tinkal* or monthly bhajan, with a garland of flowers. She would stand by the banyan tree, about half a mile from the eastern gateway of the temple, gaze at the lamps of the central shrine and pray to the deity. On one of her monthly visits she arrived late and saw that the temple was closed for the night. While she was bewailing her misfortune, Poontanam who was returning from the temple happened to see her. He consoled her saying that the Lord is omnipresent and that she could place her garland on the stone nearby and pray. And she did as advised by the great brahmin devotee.

Next morning, after the *nirmalya darshan,* the head priest while removing the previous day's adornments from the deity, found that, try as he might, one of the garlands could not be taken out. Just then Poontanam who was present for the *nirmalya darshan* remembered the incident

of the previous night and shouted: "If the garland is Manjula's let it come away." To the surprise of everyone, the garland fell off the image.

The banyan tree mentioned above, thus hallowed by the devotion of the untouchable woman, is called Manjulal, the word 'al' after Manjula being the Malayalaṁ for the banyan.

An old Nambudiri woman used to visit Guruvayur on the first day of every month. Once she was laid up with swollen legs and so could not walk from her village to the temple. Nor had she the money to travel by bus. Even if she could somehow reach Guruvayur she had no means to make the *trimadhuram* offering.

Lamenting her fate to her friend who usually accompanied her to Guruvayur, she went to bed that night chanting the name of the Lord. But those who cannot live even for a moment without the Lord's darshan or without uttering His name, are blessed by Him. The old woman found in her dream Guruvayurappan appearing before her and consoling her with these words: "You can as usual visit Guruvayur tomorrow morning. You will find the bus fare of ten annas in your money bag. As for the *Trimadhuram* I am more fond of hearing "Narayana" from my *bhaktas* than their offering".

The old lady was overjoyed at the mercy of the *bhaktavatsala* that the Lord is. She carried out His behest the next morning. She took a bus right from her doorstep,

arrived at Guruvayur without any difficulty and worshipped the deity as usual. The swelling and pain disappeared.

All that she asked of Guruvayurappan was to grant her the strength to utter His name constantly. As the *Bhagavata* proclaims:

किमलभ्यं भगवति प्रसन्ने श्रीनिकेतने ।

["If the Lord of Lakshmi blesses what cannot be gotten?"]

It would be interesting to read the personal accounts of the devotees who have experienced Sri Guruvayurappan's grace and living presence. They constitute neither legends nor folklore, but are recent incidents narrated in various issues of *Sri Guruvayurappan,* a Malayalam monthly published by the Guruvayurappan Sankeertana Trust. These accounts are given below in a condensed form along with the name of the contributors and the issue in which they appeared.

"On January 1, 1969, my fifteen-month-old child suddenly fell ill. At first I did not take it seriously, but as the hours passed, his condition gave me much cause for anxiety. So much so he was admitted in the Cochin Naval Base Hospital in an unconscious state. In a few days he regained consciousness but lost his eyesight and power of hearing. He was kept in the hospital till February 18 but the doctors were helpless. On their advice the child was taken to the C.M.C. Hospital in Vellore where he was treated from March 3 to March 17, but again with no success. When the doctors at Vellore gave up all hope, I became heart-broken. The next course was to try treatment

in some foreign countries. But that was beyond my means. "Is the child condemned to live his whole life without seeing his parents and the world and also without hearing a sound?" I lamented.

It was then that I turned to Guruvayurappan. Sitting before His picture at home day after day I wept and prayed to Him from the depths of my heart. I vowed that I would observe a 12-day bhajan at Guruvayur, the moment the child got some relief. One day while I was engaged in my daily prayer a friend brought a hakim. The hakim examined the child and said that God willing the child would be cured by his treatment. By June 15 my son showed some sign of hearing but there was no improvement in his eyesight.

One day in my lament during the evening prayer before Guruvayurappan I had a vision of Guruvayurappan in all the splendour of the evening *arti*. My eyes were blinded with tears of joy. Then I felt somebody touching my shoulder. It was my wife with the child. She announced with joy that our son's eyesight had been restored!

I can forget neither Guruvayurappan nor the doctor who was sent by Him. I lost no time in proceeding to Guruvayur for fulfilling my vow. In dire distress when man has no other go he turns to God who is always ready to protect His devotees. That is why Kunti Devi prayed to Lord Krishna that He might torment her with never-ending calamities so that her mind would always be fixed on Him."

K. Govinda Varrier, October 1969.

* * *

"It happened some fifty years ago, but is still vivid in my memory. The incident is similar to what happened to Poontanam who was waylaid by robbers on his way to Guruvayur.

I was returning home after a bhajan I performed at Guruvayur during the Vaisakha festival. Accompanied by a friend, on the way I visited Vanneri, a coastal village in the present Malappuram district, in order to see the sea which neither of us had seen before. On the beach there were four fishermen who were casting their nets. Seeing us they dropped the nets and came up to us. They spotted the two gold rings on my fingers and demanded them at knife point.

I did not mind parting with my rings but what was the guarantee that the fishermen would not do us physical harm even after acquiring the booty? So we tried to run for our lives. The ruffians caught us and beckoned us to follow them towards the sea. We did so mutely. We thought our end had come. In despair we turned to Guruvayurappan and recited the Lord's names.

Soon, it seemed, the fishermen saw someone coming towards us. They immediately let us free and ran away. But when we looked around there was no one to be seen! I felt really grateful at this incident which proved to me that the Lord's Grace was with me. I have had similar experiences of the Lord's grace on several occasions since this incident."

Muttathukattil Mamanna Ittiravi Nambudiri
November 1969

* * *

"On a hot summer day in April 1962, my one-and-half-year-old daughter had an attack of high fever and her condition became critical. I was at home with my two elder children and a 12-year-old servant girl. My husband had gone to work and was expected only by 9 P.M. There was none to help me.

As it was my evening prayer time I took the child with me and sat before the picture of Guruvayurappan. "All-merciful Guruvayurappa, do not forsake me. I have no one else to turn to",—with these words I began to recite the *Vishnu Sahasranama* (the Thousand Names of the Lord). This was not done in vain. For soon the child started getting better and took some Horlicks. I stuck to the Lord as Markandeya did to the Siva Linga on seeing Yama, the God of death.

At night my husband whom I had telephoned returned from his office with a doctor. The doctor examined the child and found her condition not encouraging. He advised her removal to hospital the next morning. I spent the long, anxious night by the side of the child constantly muttering *Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare, Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare*. As she slept soundly I did not administer her the medicine the doctor had prescribed for the night. In the morning the child woke up, laughing.

Did not Guruvayurappan, Santanagopalamurti that he is, retrieve my daughter from the jaws of death? Whoever appeals to Him sincerely is never disappointed."

K.P. Saroja, March 1970.

* * *

"In February last year I was suffering from an acute tooth ache. It was so severe that I could not even open my mouth, let alone take any food. There was a heavy swelling on the left cheek and intermittent fever. I could not have any rest since I was refused leave and the pain was such that I could not sleep. Also there was no doctor nearby, and I could do nothing but live with my pain.

But as a staunch devotee of Sri Guruvayurappan, the tooth-ache did not stop me from my daily prayers. After taking my bath in cold water first thing in the morning, I would recite verses from the *Narayaniyam* besides various other *stotras*. In due course the pain became so unbearable that I was forced to take a day's leave and go to the nearest doctor who was 20 miles away. He gave me medicine to apply to the affected teeth as also some oil to be rubbed on my head. There was some relief to the tooth-ache but I felt heavy in my head and general weakness. I spent many sleepless nights uttering the names of God and reciting verses from the *Narayaniyam*.

One day when I went to my place of work, a colleague gave me a packet containing sandal-paste saying that it was from Guruvayur and that it had been handed over by "someone". I thought Guruvayurappan had at last heard my prayers and, without further enquiries, I took the packet home. Next morning after the bath, I applied the sandal-paste to my forehead, and went to my office. After some time there was a continuous discharge of some liquid from the affected part of the mouth. By noon the swelling subsided as also the pain. It was then that I enquired of my colleague as to who was my benefactor. He said that someone passing in a car had

stopped and handed over the packet to him. To the best of my knowledge there was no possibility of any one known to me bringing a packet from Guruvayur. I was convinced the man who brought it was an agent of Guruvayurappan. Needless to add that cured me of my tooth-ache in a few days."

V. Gopalan, April 1970.

* * *

"It happened in 1945 when I was Magistrate at Chowghat. I was staying at nearby Guruvayur and one night, at about 8 o'clock, a stranger came to my house. He brought with him a letter of introduction from a friend of mine. The visitor was suffering from a skin disease in his legs which had not yielded to treatment for several years. As a last resort, he came to Guruvayur to observe bhajan. All he wanted of me was a place to stay and arrangements for the bhajan since he knew no one at Guruvayur. The very next day, I met the head priest who made all the necessary arrangements for the visitor.

Due to my official preoccupations, I forgot all about him subsequently. After about a fortnight, the gentleman came to my house again to thank me and bid me farewell. He also showed me his leg. What a transformation there was! I looked at it with open-mouthed wonder because there was not a trace of the skin trouble. He had observed 14-day's bhajan during which he had applied on the affected part the gingelly oil and sandal-paste used in the Lord's worship. This is an example of the mercy and glory of Lord

Guruvayurappan."

R. E. Gayatrinathan, January 1971.

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"Some eight years ago, when I was a student I suffered from an acute pain in my stomach. At first, I did not take it seriously and thought it would pass off soon. But the pain persisted and I had no go but to consult the doctor. His treatment did not give me any relief; on the contrary the pain increased as the days passed. So I consulted a specialist, but he could not help me. The pain became unbearable and I had also to miss my classes.

It was in such a state that one day I heard from a close relative of mine about the glory of Lord Guruvayurappan. He told me about the Vaisakha festival and the *saptaha yajna* conducted at Guruvayur during the period. It occurred to me that if I heard the *Bhagavata* recital during the season I would be cured.

So I went to Guruvayur and participated in the *Saptaha*. Listening to the Bhagavata was to me like imbibing nectar. I felt my pain gradually subsiding. One day as I was going out after darshan at the Bhagawati temple I felt my stomach ache had completely disappeared.

Since then I have been visiting Guruvayur during Vaisakha almost every year and I have had no stomach pain or any other trouble."

A. M. Sarasija, July 1970.

* * *

"Nearly 16 years ago, my husband was afflicted with eczema on both legs. We unsuccessfully tried a number of doctors, both allopathic and ayurvedic. They all gave up hopes of curing the disease. Meanwhile I went to Guruvayur to conduct the first feeding ceremony for my last child. During the occasion I prayed to the Lord that as the protector of His devotees, He was my sole refuge. I vowed that if He cured my husband's disease on the legs I would visit Guruvayur every month for darshan. How shall I describe the divine mercy of the Lord? On the fourth day after my return home I found that He did cure him "without a trace".

Last year, we had to go and settle in Madras when our daughter got a job. So I could not keep my vow of visiting Guruvayur. I, therefore, kept aside Rs. 5 every month as a penalty to be paid to Guruvayurappan. But then, while at Madras, my husband's trouble revived and his left toe became septic. It was so serious that the doctor feared it would have to be amputated. His treatment alone cost us Rs. 200 every month.

As is my habit during such crisis, I recited the entire *Narayaniyam* in three days. On the night of the third day, I dreamt that the Lord appeared before me showing my husband's toe completely cured. He invited me to come to Guruvayur and observe a three-day bhajan, which I did. My husband's trouble also vanished. Subsequently both my husband and daughter resigned their jobs in Madras and the entire family returned to its native place.

I resumed my monthly bhajan. My husband got a

better job locally and all was well again by the infinite grace of Lord Guruvayurappan."

Shrimati Thangam Rama Iyer,
May 1970.

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*Universality of the Lord*

That the Lord as omnipotent and omniscient is not comprehensible to the ordinary man was revealed in an incident reported in the *Express*, a Malayalam daily, dated December 23, 1971.

Kunchappan, a Christian, is a worker in the Kottayam Rubber Plantations, Pazhambalakot. He led a contented life with his wife and four children.

On hearing of the disastrous fire that broke out at the Guruvayur temple on November 30, 1970, he ridiculed Hindu gods and asked why such accidents should occur in temples if the deities were powerful. And he particularly derided Guruvayurappan.

That very night he heard somebody questioning him from his back, "Did you not deride me?" He turned behind but found no one. The question was heard repeated many times and continued even the next day. Kunchappan was really perplexed as to who could be the questioner.

Next day when he went out, a flock of crows flew around him, harassing him wherever he went. He did not

reveal these to any one. But when he could no longer bear the harassment, he spoke to his wife about it. She attributed her husband's trouble to the wrath of Guruvayurappan. "Are not Christ and Krishna one and the same God?", "Are they not universal?" "Am I not wrong in deriding the one and praising the other?" These were some of the questions that arose in his mind. He repented of his action and asked the Lord's forgiveness.

That very night he was commanded by the Lord Himself to proceed to Guruvayur with his family and offer *vazhivadus*. Kunchappan consulted his neighbour Krishnan Nair and with him went to Guruvayur. For his expenses he sold his goat. On arrival at Guruvayur he and the members of his family took a bath and had darshan of the Lord from outside the eastern *nada,* while Krishnan Nair conducted all the *vazhivadus* inside.

The party returned home with a picture of Sri Guruvayurappan and installed it by the side of Jesus Christ. Kunchappan's mental peace was restored and he was once again a happy man.

In this context, it is worth while to remember that during the devastating fire in the Guruvayur temple, thousands of people from the entire neighbourhood, irrespective of caste, creed and community (Hindus, Muslims and Christians) rushed to the temple at dead of night and fought the furious fire, shoulder to shoulder, as members of one family. The demonstration of such an inspiring faith in the divine is something unique, exemplifying the universality of the Lord.

Indeed volumes could be filled with the lilas of the Lord as narrated in this Chapter. But then as Narayana Bhattatiri said, "He alone can describe the exploits of the Lord who can count the particles of dust on earth."

*The Legend Behind Vakacharthu**

Once there was an untouchable boy named Chashu. He was orphaned as a child. At the age of 10, he did odd jobs for a pittance. He spent his nights in a dilapidated hut crying to the Lord to save him from hunger. Once he was without food for three days continuously. No one worried about him. Unable to bear the pangs of hunger any longer he went to a nearby river and was about to drown himself when the sage Narada appeared before him.

Telling the boy that it was a sin to commit suicide, the sage gave him a vessel which he said would produce food at will. With it Chashu managed his food for many days. In due course, however, he became greedy and wanted to have a big house to live in. He thought another attempt to drown in the river would bring forth Narada and the fruition of his second wish. He went to the river to jump into it. But to his dismay, as he looked around, not only was there no Narada but even the vessel which produced the food had vanished.

Hunger gripped him again and his body was afflicted with rashes. He became so repulsive that nobody went near him. Forsaken by all he bemoaned his plight which he had himself brought about. The sage Narada appeared

* Vakacharthu by K. Gangadevi Antherjanam, 'Sri Guruvayurappan', Magazine, February 1970.

once again and spoke to him thus: "In your previous birth, you had a son named Sambhu. He now lives happily in heaven. It is due to his devotion to the Lord that you are able to see me. You continue to stay here uttering His Holy names. You will get deliverance in good time."

Accordingly Chashu spent his days in meditation. Eventually his cries were heard in Vaikuntha. Moved by them the Lord's consort Lakshmi implored Him to go at once to the aid of His devotee. "Did you not hear Kuchela and go to his rescue?" she asked.

The Lord smiled and said that Chashu had not yet expiated his sins. "In his previous birth he was a priest," Vishnu said. "He had a son called Sambhu who was very devoted to me. The boy lost his mother early and had no one to care for him as his father was all the time in the company of a prostitute. The priest also neglected the temple which was in any case in a state of decay. Young Sambhu took over the affairs of the temple and conducted the puja. He attained me because of his devotion. But the father continues to suffer because he is devoted to Me only till his work is done. Once his desire is fulfilled he forgets Me. I therefore accept my devotees only after testing them. Otherwise they will become proud and forget themselves."

But Lakshmi could not bear the cries of Chashu any longer. She once again urged the Lord not to delay further. In the mean time Chashu had become unconscious. The Lord appeared before him and stroked his head. Chashu got up and implored the Lord to take him to His lotus feet. He also requested to grant his wish that he might be of some

help to those who suffered from similar infections. The Lord agreed and said: "You will be born as a *vaka* tree in Kaliyuga when I will be the presiding deity at Guruvayur. After the morning oil *abhishekam* every day I will be cleaned with *vaka* powder. You will thus serve Me and, through Me, thousands of my devotees who will get rid of similar skin diseases."

Saying this the Lord blessed Chashu and disappeared. This is how the daily ritual of *Vakacharthu* at Guruvayur originated.

## CHAPTER IX

# THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE TEMPLE

No authentic records are available of the early ownership and management of the temple. But tradition has it that originally the shrine was managed by 72 *illams* belonging to Guruvayur. In due course all of them except Mallisseri became extinct. Then the Zamorin of Calicut who was the ruler of the land assumed the trusteeship of the temple with Mallisseri Nambudiri as a co-trustee.

For over half a century, i.e. from 1825 to 1892, the temple was managed under a scheme framed by the Court by which an agent was appointed jointly by the trustees. He was directly responsible for the management of the Devaswom.

From about 1889, however, disputes arose between the two trustees, each trying for the upper hand. They led to many unpleasant incidents—the temple even remained closed for over a week. In 1893, a compromise was arrived at between the two and once again it was smooth going for the affairs of the temple. However, matters came to a head

and in 1916, the Court of Wards assumed the management of the Devaswom along with the trustees.

After the compromise of 1893, many improvements were effected in the temple. Some repairs were carried out in the existing structures, while a few new buildings were added. The roofs of the Srikoil, Vatilmatams, Chuttambalam and Kuttambalam were also plated with copper.

Again in 1927, the Zamorin got back the management from the Court of Wards and the temple came under his direct control.

From 1930, the Devaswom came to be managed under a scheme framed by the Madras High Court. The scheme was slightly modified three years later. By this the powers of the trustees were clearly defined and their sphere of action strictly restricted. Rules were laid down for the upkeep of the temple and for its efficient management. Salaries for the manager and supervision charges for the two trustees were also fixed. A Superintendent was appointed for the general management of the temple.

Under the provisions of the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act, the Guruvayur temple became an excepted temple which meant that the H.R.E. Board had supervising authority over its affairs. In 1939, when the Congress was in power, the Board, not satisfied with the running of the temple by the trustees, gave notice to the temple of assuming supreme control. But the Zamorin moved the High Court and the Board's notification order was nullified. The High Court passed strictures on the H.R.E. Board for noti-

fying a temple governed by a scheme framed by a Civil Court and defying thereby the status of the Court. Thereafter, the Board again made attempts to bring the Devaswom under its control, but without any success. The administration of the temple thus continued under the joint trusteeship of the Zamorin and the Mallisseri Nambudiri as under the 1930-scheme.

But over the years the affairs of the shrine had been steadily deteriorating as is indeed the case with many other temples in Kerala whether managed privately or by the Devaswom Board. This is as much due to the carelessness of the temple authorities as to the indifference of devotees. With a view, therefore, to improving the affairs of the Guruvayur temple, which is fast becoming a pilgrim centre of all-India fame and for the benefit of its ever-increasing number of devotees, the 1930 scheme was replaced by the Guruvayur Devaswom Act, 1971, enacted by the Kerala Government. The Act came into force on March 9, 1971.

Under the provisions of this Act, the administration of the temple is entrusted to a committee known as the Guruvayur Devaswom Managing Committee. The day-to-day administration of the Devaswom will be carried out by an Administrator appointed by the Government.

The Managing Committee will, of course, include the present trustees, namely, the Zamorin as the President and the Mallisseri Nambudiri as the Vice-President. The Chairman of the Guruvayur Township, the Administrator, the temple Tantri, representative of the employees, and members of the public including a Harijan nominated by the Govern-

ment constitute the Committee. The members of the very first Committee appointed under the Act are listed below:

1. Zamorin Raja, Calicut (President, ex-officio).
2. Mallisseri Krishnan Nambudiripad (Vice-President, ex-officio).
3. Guruvayur Township Chairman, Shri C.K.K. Panickar, I.A.S. (ex-officio).
4. Tantri Chennas Parameswaran Nambudiripad (ex-officio).
5. P. V. Radhakrishnan.
6. Vadekkara Balan Nair.
7. V. Radhakrishnan Eradi.
8. M. P. Muthedath.
9. K. Kunjambu.
10. A. K. Gangadharan.
11. C. K. Nair.
12. Kidangur Gopala Krishna Pillai.
13. Puthur Unni Krishnan (Representative of Devaswom employees).
14. C. H. Damodaran Nambiar (Administrator and Secretary, ex-officio).

The duties of this Committee have been clearly defined under the Act, which cover all aspects of the temple's administration. The conduct of the daily pujas, of the festivals as laid down by the Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act (XIX of 1951), provision of proper facilities for worship by the devotees, the custody of the temple cash, vessels and jewellery, administration of the

Devaswom properties, maintenance of cleanliness in the temple and its environs, administration of charities instituted by the public, payment to employees, etc., are responsibilities of the Committee.

For the post of Administrator an officer not below the rank of a Deputy Collector or Deputy Commissioner is appointed by the Government. He acts as the Secretary of the Managing Committee and the Chief Executive of the Devaswom.

For the appointment of the Devaswom employees, the Act provides for the constitution of a Board with the Commissioner as President and the Administrator, two members of the Temple Management Committee and a nominee of the District Collector of Trichur as members.

There is also provision for the constitution of Committees for renovation of the temple and to raise funds etc.

It will be seen from the above that the temple administration which hitherto vested in the two traditional trustees has now extended to 14 members who constitute the new Managing Committee. It is, however, not on the number but on the quality of the members that the efficiency of the future administration of this great temple will depend. Obviously they must be men of integrity and imbued with deep faith in Hindu dharma.

In this context, it would be worth while to quote from an article written by Shri S. Ramakrishnan, Editor, *Bhavan's*

*Journal,* in the issue dated December 13, 1970, i.e. after the fire in the temple in November.

"Administrative indifference, inefficiency and other acts of omission and commission had, of late, tended to detract from the sanctity of this holy of holies. Legislative and governmental intrusions into temple affairs had also forced the administration to curtail or do away with some of the hallowed modes of worship, offerings, mass feeding, etc., for which the temples in Kerala in general and Guruvayur in particular, were well-known.

A re-appraisal of official policy, enforced with mistaken notions of economy and egalitarianism and with scant respect for traditions and age-old practices, is immediately called for. All the customary and time-honoured rituals and modes of worship, offerings, etc., have to be restored and left free from official meddling, so that these ancient shrines could continue to draw legions of worshippers from all corners of the land, in the process imperceptibly making our people better men and women, and at the same time silently promoting national unity."

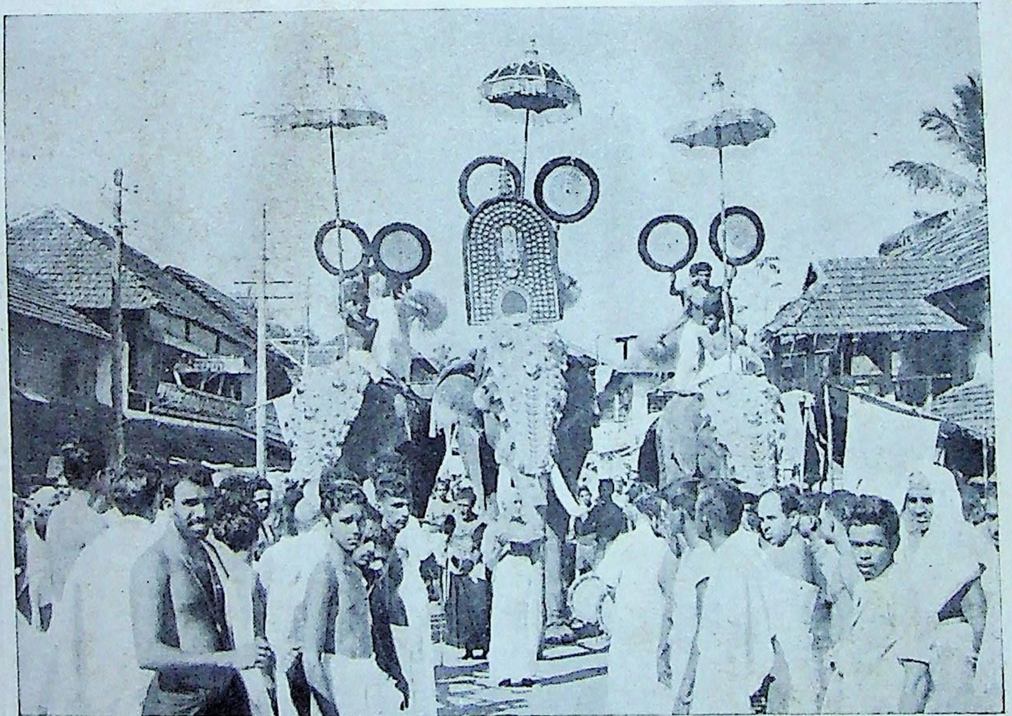
CHAPTER X

# THE PATH OF DEVOTION

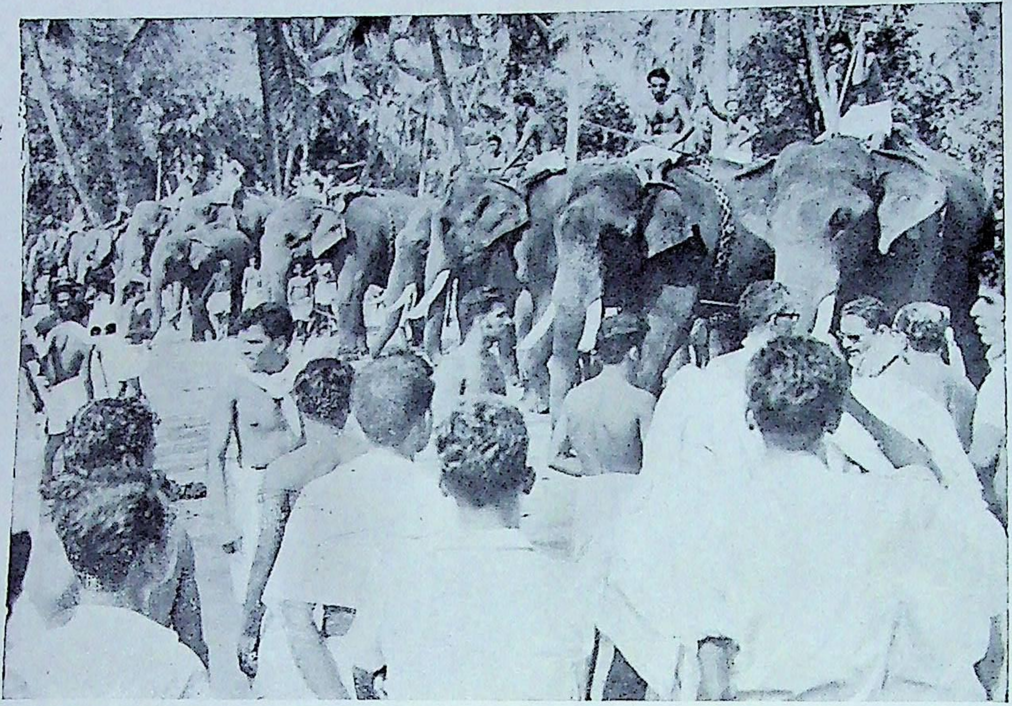
Krishna is Jaganmohana, enchanter of all the world. It is not only Radha and all the other Gopis who yearn for union with him, not only Andal and Mira. All devotees, men and women, look upon him as their lover. There is no *prema* higher than love of the Lord. And this *prema* is demonstrated nowhere else with such feeling as before the deity of Guruvayur. Guruvayurappan is Balagopala, Balakrishna. The devout hear him play the flute and they go to him as at the bidding of a lover.

Even the selfish, the greedy and the vainglorious who are drawn towards him are made whole as the ones who are sick of mind and body. *Bhakti* transforms them and makes them give up the pursuit of all else. Even the man who seeks power and wealth ultimately seeks nothing but his grace. The *bhakta* becomes a *jnani* and becomes one with the Lord.

Let us recall what Krishna said to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra;

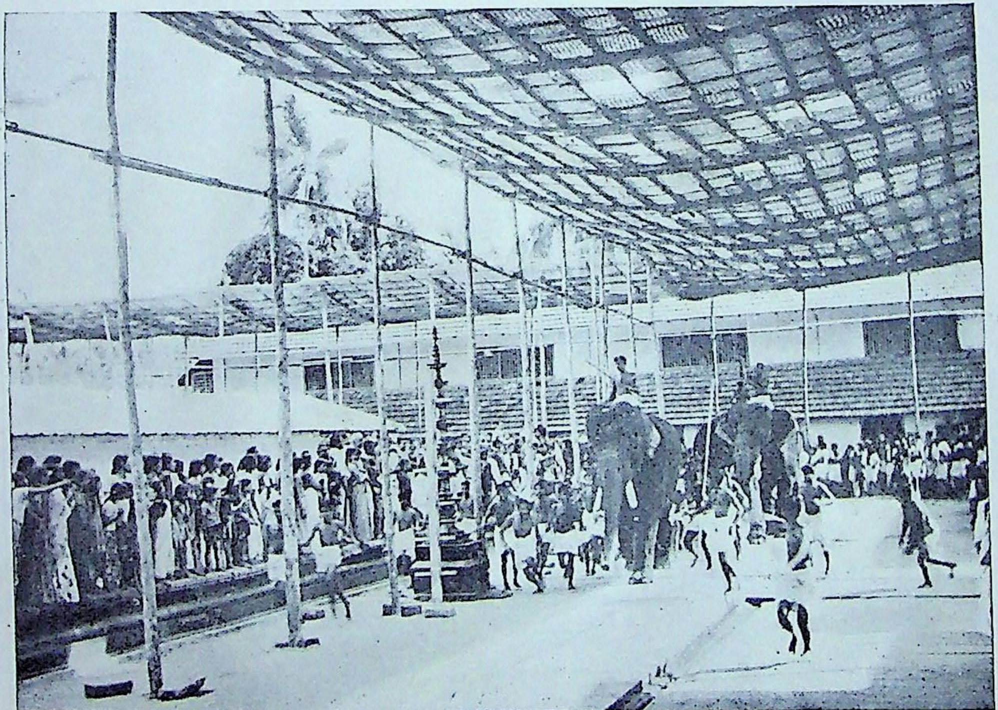


*On the concluding day of the Ekadasi festival (November-December) the Lord comes out of the temple in procession to give darshan to the multitudes.*
*Photo*: Bhavana Studio.



*The elephants are arranged for the race held on the eve of the annual temple festival (Utsavam).*

*Photo*: Bhavana Studio.



*The elephant race on the inaugural day of Utsavam. The tuskers running round the temple before reaching the finishing point—the flag-staff.*
*Photo*: Bhavana Studio.

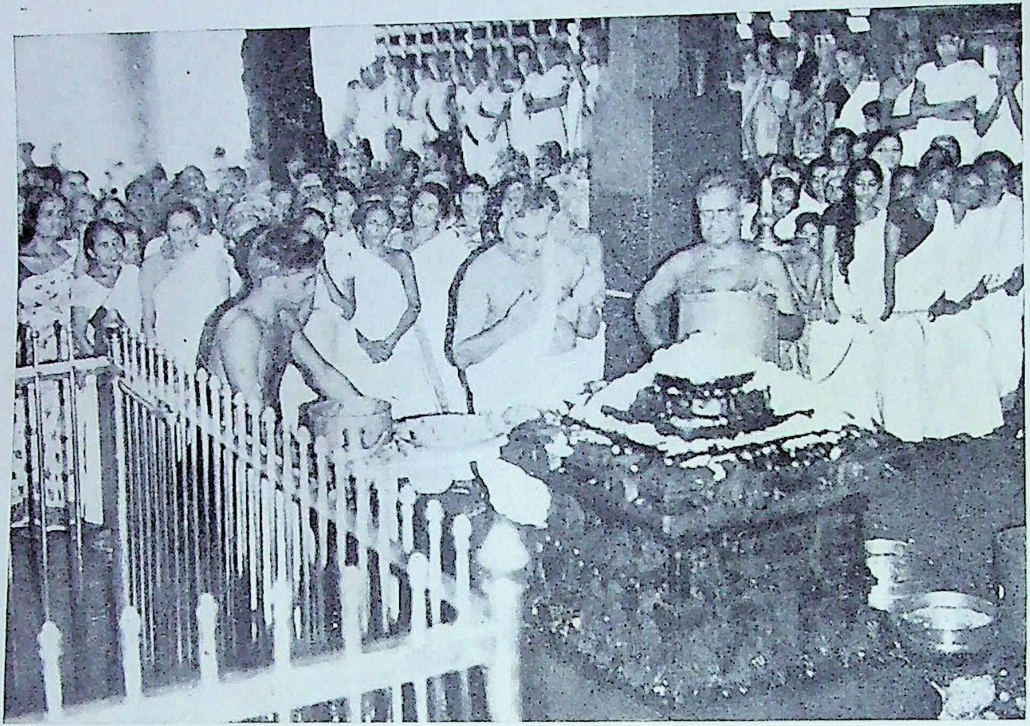


*Sahasrakalasam—consecration of a thousand pots of water for abhisheka during Utsavam.*
*Photo*: Bhavana Studio.



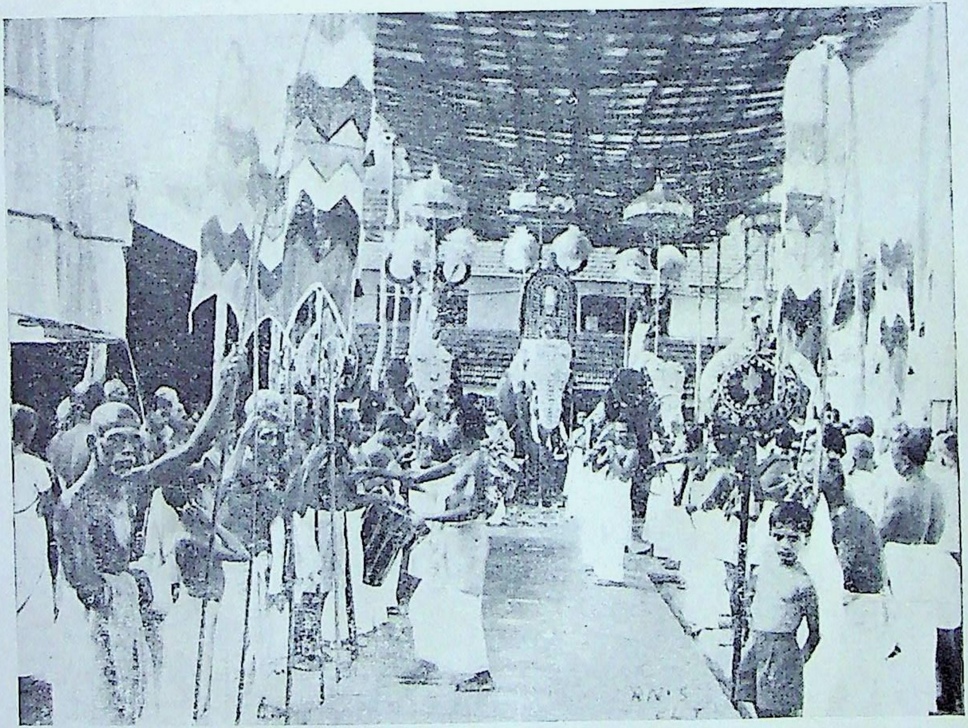
*The procession carrying Brahmakalasam (holy water for bathing the deity) during the Utsavam.*

*Photo*: Bhavana Studio.



Utsavabali *conducted on the eighth day of* Utsavam *when oblations are made to all the Gods and Goddesses. The officiating priest is Shri Chennas Parameswaran Nambudiripad, Tantri of the temple.*

*Photo*: Bhavana Studio.



*Divine pageant—The morning elephant procession during the annual festival. With* Chamaras *swinging and* alavattams *held aloft the procession provides a grand sight.*
*Photo*: R. N's Art Studio, Calicut.



*Krishnattam—the dance of Krishna—based on Jayadeva's Gita Govinda is very popular, witnessed by devotees as an act of piety.*
*Photo: Courtesy:* PAICO Publishing House, Cochin

चतुर्विधा भजन्ते मां जनाः सुकृतिनोऽर्जुन ।
आर्तो जिज्ञासुरर्थार्थी ज्ञानी च भरतर्षभ ।।

[Four types of righteous men worship Me, O Arjuna—the man in distress (*arta*), the man who wishes to learn (*jijnasu*), the man who has an object to gain (*artharthi*) and the man who knows (*jnani*)].

The *arta* is one who is distraught in body and mind, by family cares and anxieties. Draupadi who was dishonoured in the court of Duryodhana stands for this kind of sufferer. The *jijnasu* is a seeker after knowledge, the truth. Uddhava and Arjuna are examples. The *artharthi* is desirous of the good things of the world, of land, of wealth. Dhruva is an example of this type of devotee who sought the highest position and worldly boons. The *jnani* is one who has an awareness of the Reality and sees God in everything and everything in God. Prahlada, Suka, Narada and others stand for the wise, knowers of the truth.

How and why should one pray? This has been best answered by Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchi, His Holiness Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamiji, in his comments on one of Adi Sankaracharya's *Vishnu Shatpadi*.*

We go to a physician seeking a cure for the ills of our body. To earn a livelihood we work for our employers. Thus each of our wants is fulfilled in a specific way. But we cannot acquire all that we want by seeking only the aid of human agencies. We should first lay our troubles before God and then go to the concerned man for help.

* *Bhavan's Journal*, Annual Number, August 8, 1971.

Further, says His Holiness, we should not ask God only for the blessings of this world; we should also pray to Him for *moksha*. But then we have our family and other dependants to look after. We shall be failing in our duty towards them if we selfishly ask for our *moksha*. We must therefore first fulfil our duty to our family and try to overcome our troubles with the assistance of those who can help us. But here again we should submit our difficulties to God and pray to Him for His grace. In other words, *Isvaranugraha, purushaprayatna* and *adrishta*—the Grace of God, human endeavour and the unseen power which brings karma to fruition—all these must combine to enable us to overcome our troubles and have our desires fulfilled.

Again, we may enjoy all worldly goods, but still we may not be happy. What we should ask for in our prayer is, therefore, *manasshanti,* peace of mind, without which sorrows will continue to disturb us.

Now the question arises: what should we do to be liberated from the cycle of birth and death (i.e., attain *moksha*)?

*Superiority of Bhakti Marga*

There are three main ways of achieving final deliverance. They are the paths of karma (action), jnana (knowledge) and bhakti (devotion) depending upon one's constitution, temperament and personality. The path of karma or karma yoga is the path of action, of service, of duty for duty's sake, of work dedicated to the Lord without any desire for the fruits thereof. By dedicating one's actions to the Lord

one is in due course freed from all attachments and becomes a realised soul.

Jnana yoga is for those who are averse to all objects of pleasure and have no attachments. They are men who have no sense of *ahankara*—I-ness.

Then there is the third class of people who have not become sufficiently detached either to follow the path of *nishkamakarma* or that of jnana. They have, however, faith in the Lord and sing his praises. Their devotion ultimately serves the same purpose as that of the karma yogin or the jnana yogin for they too become detached and earn moksha. Theirs is the path of devotion—bhakti marga.

It will be seen that unlike the jnana marga and the karma marga, the bhakti marga is the easiest way to salvation for the common man. A jnani has to attain mastery over his senses and become aware of the Supreme in an intellectual sense. The path of karma with all its fasts, vows and rituals entails considerable physical and mental hardship. The bhakti marga can be followed by the humblest of devotees. That is why even a supreme jnani like Adi Sankara indicated in his *Vivekachudamani*: "*Moksha karana samagrayam bhaktireva gareeyasi*" that is, of the means to attain moksha, bhakti is the best.

What is bhakti? It is a continuous effort to be in tune with the Infinite. For this the bhakta has an *ishtadevata* or chosen deity and imparts to it all the finest qualities. As he meditates on this deity day after day a time comes when he sees Him everywhere, and in all.

The superiority of the Bhakti marga stems from the fact that it leads one to final emancipation in a single life apart from its being the easiest to practise. For a jnani to have an awareness of an indeterminate Brahman he must have mastery of difficult texts like the Upanishads. This is not easy to acquire in one life; so perforce he is born again and again before he finally attains his goal.

Similarly, the practice of karma yoga requires qualifications as enjoined by the *sastras.* Moreover the fruits of karma are transitory, because though the aspirant attains heaven, he continues to be attached to pleasures. Thus when the merit he has earned is exhausted he is born again in the mortal world and as such does not attain final deliverance.

*A Way of Life*

Considering all this the best path is that of Bhakti which can be practised even while clinging to worldly attachments. It may be asked how true devotion to the Lord is consistent with worldly attachments. The point to note is that *bhakti* is a way of life. Prayer, *namajapa* and bhajan will in course of time help the devout to give up worldly attachments one by one. This achieved, there is sufficient inducement to fix one's mind exclusively on the Lord, and this will eventually lead to *chittasuddhi* or purity of mind and consciousness.

*Srimad Bhagavata* deals elaborately with the importance and superiority of bhakti yoga in Chapter 14 of the eleventh canto which contains the cream of spiritual teach-

ing. In this exposition, Lord Krishna tells His friend Uddhava that devotion is the best means of obtaining happiness and that no happiness can equal the ecstasy born of love of the Lord. The *Bhagavata* describes how the ordinary devotee gains control over the senses and becomes a superior man exulting in that pure unalloyed devotional love to the Supreme.

In the beginning, due to lack of control over the senses the ordinary devotee finds it difficult to free himself from worldly pleasures. But by persistence, he becomes so much imbued with the spirit of devotion that he succeeds. As the blazing fire consumes firewood, so intensity of devotion to the Lord burns up all his inborn inclination or *janmantara vasana* for the gratification of the senses. Thus control of senses and aversion to worldly pleasures naturally follow in the wake of development of devotional love to the Lord.

With worldly objects and pleasures holding no more attraction for him, the devotee becomes a free man. He sees nothing but happiness all around and beholds the Lord in everything. Just as the fish in the deep sea thinks that everywhere there is naught but water, so the devotee in the exultation of his love of the Lord who is bliss supreme thinks that all the world is bliss and bliss alone. Such is the state of a highly evolved bhakta that he does not even bother about his personal salvation and knows nothing other than the ananda or joy of the Supreme.

The *Bhagavata* describes the several sattwic manifestations, mental and physical, born of devotional love. The

mind of the superior devotee is tempered in the exultation of devotion. He feels a thrill of joy and awe and tears of ecstasy come to his eyes in contemplating the Lord. How bhakti conduces to purity of mind and the consequent dawn of true knowledge is described by this purana thus: Just as the eyes gain keenness of vision by constant application of collyrium, so the mind of the devotee by constant reading, reciting, hearing and meditating upon the glories of the Lord becomes purged of all worldly desires and passions and reflects the light of true knowledge and spiritual wisdom.

The concluding chapters of the eleventh canto referred to above then describe how the mind after being purified through devotion becomes fit for the meditation of the Lord and how this meditation is to be practised. A comfortable posture, keeping the body erect and fixing the gaze on the tip of the nose, rhythmic breathing (pranayama) are the successive steps for practising meditation.

The ordinary mind, shrouded in Maya, is aware only of objects of pleasures and pain. By the development of bhakti through meditation the mind is purified and is fixed on the beautiful form of the Lord. The next stage in the final evolution of meditation is absorption of the impersonal form of the Supreme which is of the nature of true knowledge and is self-luminous. This is the ultimate goal of a bhakta and when he realises, all distinctions between concentration and the object concentrated cease.

It will be seen from the brief description above how an ordinary devotee beginning with the simple process of

adoring his *ishtadevata* overcomes sensual and worldly pleasures, attains purity of mind and evolves into a superior devotee and ultimately reaches his final goal through absorption of his atman in the Supreme. In other words *bhakti* is the easiest way to *jnana*.

*Efficacy of Nama Japa*

The sages have laid down eight easy and quick means of deliverance in Kaliyuga. The first is partaking of the Ganga water. The second is study of the *Bhagavad Gita* through which Lord Krishna teaches the dejected, bewildered Arjuna the paths of karma, jnana and bhakti and advises him on the virtue of doing one's duty for duty's sake without any attachment to the fruits thereof. The third is reciting the Gayatri mantra which the twice-born are enjoined to repeat daily at dawn, midday and sundown. It is said that there is no mantra higher than Gayatri and no deity greater than Mother and those who repeat the Gayatri mantra mentally knowing its significance become pure of mind.

The fourth is worshipping the tulasi plant, the resting place of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity. Hence this finds a place in every Hindu home. The fifth is wearing the scented clay called Gopikachandana which includes both sandal and ashes. It wards off the effects of a foul atmosphere, thus conducing to physical health and mental purity. The sixth is the worship of the stone Salagrama which is obtained from the river Gandak in Nepal.

The seventh is the observance of the fast of Ekadasi,

the eleventh day of the moon, twice a month. The eighth and the last is the repetition of the holy names of the Lord, *Vishnu Sahasranama* and the like.

Of the importance of the repetition of the Lord's names Sri Krishna Himself has said to Arjuna: *Yajnanam japayajnosmi* (Of yajnas—sacrifices—I am *japayajna* i.e. the sacrifice of silent repetition of the Lord's name). It can be performed at any time and in the midst of any activity. Since the Lord Himself is *japa yajna* He is present wherever *japa yajna* takes place. Hence the importance of chanting the Lord's name daily in every home.

That repetition of the Lord's name, even unintentionally conduces to good has been proved by the episode of Ajamila. Formerly a brahmin leading the virtuous life of a householder, he went to the forest to gather flowers, *darbha* grass and other materials necessary for the worship of God. There he met a courtesan and was lured away by her. Discarding his duty, he spent his time with her in sensual pleasures. But in his old age, he became attached to his son who bore the Lord's name, Narayana.

When he was on his death-bed he saw the three messengers of Yama, the god of death, and in fear he called out for his son, Narayana. When the Lord's name was uttered, there appeared before him His attendants, four-armed, dressed in yellow garments and charming to behold. They said to Yama's minions: "The glory of that Hari is such that the mere repetition of the name of Mukunda,

even if unconsciously done, destroys men's sins, as fire burns down fuel and as medicine dispels diseases." The messengers of Yama fled and Ajamila was blessed with another lease of life during which he remained devoted to the Lord.

Such is the efficacy of chanting the Lord's name of which many more examples have been cited in the Chapter on "The lilas of Sri Guruvayurappan."

The *Bhagavata* also describes how bhakti is inspired in man and developed. This is important to those who have still doubts about the efficacy of the path of devotion or who do not know how to go about it at all. The means prescribed again is easy, that is, the mere association with the virtuous and devoted—*satsanga*. A man is known by the company he keeps. Only the blessed are happy and lucky to obtain their association with the virtuous. They (the virtuous) have in their mind the thought only of the Lord, which influences their associates in body, word and deed. They are always given to the recitation, remembrance and hearing of the Lord's glory and deeds. By constant association with them one acquires their qualities imbued with the spirit of devotion.

Summing up, therefore, the first step in the path of devotion is to have recourse to the devoted. Second, to cultivate this spirit of devotion by reciting stories of the Lord's incarnations and adventures, repeating His holy names, visiting shrines, etc. Thus one's mind becomes attuned to the path of devotion. This may be called subjective devo-

tion where one's interest is more concentrated on the several means of devotion.

Then comes objective devotion in which the means have no predominance. The bhakta's mind flows towards the Lord and over nothing but Him and becomes God-intoxicated. "It exults in that ecstasy, sometimes laughing, sometimes weeping or bawling or singing or dancing wildly as the realisation of the Lord within prompts ...... All these actions are spontaneous acts like those of a mad man. His mind is quite beyond the approach of worldly hopes and feelings. It is overspread with the divine feeling and influence of the Lord."

Lastly, let us remember that to be born a human being in this world is not a curse as many who are unhappy would think. It is in fact a rare good fortune because only by taking birth as a human being can one strive to get out of the cycle of birth, sickness, old age and death and ultimately attain *moksha*. It is said that even the Gods have no right to practise the *sadhana* necessary for attaining the Divine Bliss or Mukti. It is only in the human birth that one can practise the *sadhana* such as Karma, Bhakti and Jnana which are the means available to attain *moksha*.*

*Unswerving Devotion*

Herein, therefore, lies the importance of human life of which we should make the best to attain divine grace without allowing it to degenerate. The Lord's injunction in this

* "Sincere devotion alone counts" by H. H. Jagadguru Sankaracharya of Sringeri: *Bhavan's Journal*, Annual Number, August 8, 1971.

regard through His advice to Devahooti in His incarnation as Kapila is quite clear:

अह ह बहुर्लाहिंसासञ्चितार्थैः कुटुम्बं
प्रतिदिनमनुपुष्पन् स्त्रीजितो बाललाली।
विशति हि गृहसक्तो यातनां मय्यभक्तः
कपिलतनुरिति त्वं देवहूत्यै न्यगादीः॥

*Narayaniyam*, dasaka 15, sloka 6.

[Alas; Alas! that man verily enters hell who supports his family with the wealth acquired by inflicting pain on others, who is addicted to sensual pleasures and dotes on his children and is attached to his home without any devotion towards Me.]

The idea is not to condemn the life of a householder who spends his time according to scriptural injunctions without attachment to home or its inmates. It only indicates the result of leading a bad life so that the spirit of devotion may gain strength in the aspirant.

The essence of bhakti and the path to be pursued by the *sadhakas* for the attainment of the Lord is best described by the Lord Himself in the last three verses of Chapter XI of the Gita:

नाहं वेदैर्न तपसा न दानेन न चेज्यया।
शक्य एवंविधो द्रष्टुं दृष्टवानसि मां यथा॥
भक्त्या त्वनन्यया शक्य अहमेवंविधोऽर्जुन।
ज्ञातुं द्रष्टुं च तत्त्वेन प्रवेष्टुं च परंतप॥
मत्कर्मकृन्मत्परमो मद्भक्तः सङ्गवर्जितः।
निर्वैरः सर्वभूतेषु यः स मामेति पाण्डव॥

[Neither by the study of the Vedas nor by the practice of austerity; neither by making gifts, nor by performing sacrifice, can I be seen in this form as you have seen Me. But, O Arjuna, this form of Mine can be known and seen in reality and also entered into by only *unswerving devotion* (*ananya bhakti*). He who does work for Me, he who looks on Me as the Supreme, he who is devoted to Me, he who gives up attachment, he who is without hatred for any being, he attains Me, O Pandava].

* * *

It happened about seventy years ago* and was heard from those who were eye witnesses.

Venkataraman, a poor Brahmin from Palghat, came to Guruvayur in search of a livelihood. He did odd jobs for shop keepers in the east *nada* and earned a pittance that was not enough even for his *pan*.

In this manner he spent nearly five years in Guruvayur during which time he did not enter the temple even once with any sincere devotion. But almost everyday he ate the meal served in the *uttupura* and went away without any thought of the deity.

One evening he happened to join the throng of devotees at the time of the *diparadhana* (arati). The doors of the sanctum were about to open. Full-throated chants of 'Narayana', 'Narayana' filled the air.

Venkataraman was moved by all this. He too uttered the name of the Lord with the rest and circumambulated

* *Sree Guruvayurappan* by Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri.

the sanctum. On the northern *vatilmatam* a scholar was reciting the *Bhagavata*. He was none other than the famed, Bhagavatottama Kudallore Kunhikavu Nambudiripad. The assembled devotees, as usual, were listening to him with rapt attention. Venkataraman also joined the audience.

The discourse over, Venkataraman prostrated himself at the feet of the Nambudiripad. With tears in his eyes he confessed: "Though I have heard about your greatness I was till now under the impression that the recitation of the *Bhagavata, namasankirtana* etc., had no meaning and were only meant to deceive others with a pretence of *bhakti*. In the company of evil men I have even spoken derisively about you. Kindly forgive me and bless me that at least the remaining years of my life may be spent in the contemplation of the Lord."

Sri Kunhikavu consoled him and said: "You have already been redeemed from all sins by your devotion to Sri Guruvayurappan. Listening to *Bhagavata,* chanting the Lord's name, etc., is given only to those who are blessed on account of their good deeds in previous births. One need not renounce one's family or give up one's normal pursuits to become a true devotee. But whatever one does should be performed with devotion and the thought of God should be rooted in our minds. You are indeed fortunate to have resorted to Guruvayurappan."

From then on, the path was illumined for the poor brahmin. He soon realised that mental peace which every one seeks can easily be had through daily worship of the

Lord, hearing about His lilas and chanting His name. His prayer to Sri Guruvayurappan was:

अनायासेन मरणं
विना दैन्येन जीवनम् ।
देहि मे कृपया कृष्ण
त्वयि भक्तिरचञ्चला ।।

["A life without hardships and an end that is peaceful. This is all I ask of you, Krishna, and unswerving devotion for you."]

Venkataraman passed about five years as a changed man. It was the month of Vrischika and the holy Ekadasi festival had just been celebrated. Two days later, it was again the *Bhagavata* discourse by Sri Kunhikavu Nambudiripad. It was now conducted at 3 P.M. instead of at dusk, for the convenience of the devotees who had gathered in their thousands. The venue however was the same—the northern *vatilmatam*.

Venkataraman, who every day made obeisance to Sri Kunhikavu at the end of the discourse, however, got up a little earlier that day, bowed and walked towards the sanctum. There he fell prostrate with his head towards the deity. He remained in the same posture for a long time. The other devotees thought that he was in a state of ecstasy in which everything else is forgotten. But lo! he lay motionless like a log. People soon realised that Venkataraman was dead, that he attained the feet of Lord Guruvayurappan—the *"anayasena maranam"* which he had been praying for every day.

Indeed, it was a revealing moment—people experiencing the living presence of the Lord Who once again demonstrated the truth of what He preached in the *Gita*.

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां
ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां
योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ।।

[To those men who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, who are ever devout, I provide gain and security.]

Those who go to Guruvayur and pray to the deity there attain *ananyabhakti* and eventually see His form and attain union with It.

## GLOSSARY

*Avatara* .. Incarnation
*Adharma* .. Sin, unrighteous action, opposite of dharma
*Annaprasana* .. Feeding with rice; the term usually refers to ceremonial feeding of a child
*Appan* .. Father
*Aarati* .. The concluding rite of a puja in which lamps are lit to the deity
*Arattu* .. Bathing festival
*Agrasala* .. Dining hall
*Attazham* .. Food offerings at night
*Abhishekam* .. Rite of bathing the deity
*Ambalavasi* .. Temple attendant
*Archana* .. Offer of flowers to the deity
*Ashrama* .. Hermitage, also one of the four prescribed stages of life.

*Bhakti* .. Devotion to God, loyalty, faith
*Bhakta* .. Devotion
*Balikkallu* .. Altar
*Bhajan* .. Worship
*Bhaktavatsala* .. One to whom a devotee is dear—the deity one worships
*Bhiksha* .. Alms

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Chamara* | .. | Fly-whisk |
| *Devaswom* | .. | The authority which administers a temple |
| *Darshan* | .. | Glimpse of the Lord |
| *Divya-Mangala-Swaroopa* | .. | Godly and auspicious form |
| *Dharma* | .. | Duty as laid down by religion or custom |
| *Deepasthambha* | .. | Pillar of lights |
| *Dwajasthambha* | .. | Flag-staff |
| *Deeparadhana* | .. | Arati |
| *Darbha* | .. | Sacred grass used in religious rites |
| *Ekadasi* | .. | The eleventh day of the moon |
| *Garbhagriha* | .. | Sanctum Sanctorum |
| *Gopuram* | .. | Tower built at one of the gateways to a temple |
| *Gurudakshina* | .. | Offering (fee paid) to the teacher |
| *Illam* | .. | Nambudiri household |
| *Jnana* | .. | Spiritual knowledge, realisation |
| *Jnani* | .. | A knower of reality |
| *Janma* | .. | Birth |
| *Kaliyuga* | .. | The age of Kali, one of the four eons according to the Hindu cycle of time |
| *Kuttu* | .. | Literally dance |
| *Kuttambalam* | .. | Temple of dance, auditorium attached to a temple |
| *Kumbha* | .. | Sacred Waterpot |
| *Kizhu Santi* | .. | Assistant priest |
| *Kalabhabhishekam* | .. | Anointment with sandal paste |
| *Lila* | .. | Play; the inexplicable ways of Providence |
| *Lakshana* | .. | Sign |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Mulasthana* | .. | Base |
| *Mandapam* | .. | Raised platform or pavilion |
| *Madappalli* | .. | Temple Kitchen |
| *Matilakam* | .. | Temple courtyard |
| *Malar* | .. | Puffed rice |
| *Melsanti* | .. | Head priest |
| *Muhurtam* | .. | Auspicious moment or hour |
| *Moksha* | .. | Liberation from the cycle of birth and death; salvation |
| *Nirmalyam* | .. | The previous day's decorations still on the Lord; also, immaculate |
| *Naivedyam* | .. | Food offering to the Lord |
| *Nada* | .. | Gateway |
| *Nalambalam* | .. | The structure around the sanctum; cloister |
| *Namasankirtana* | .. | Singing the praises of the Lord |
| *Nirapara* | .. | Offer of a measure of rice for the deity |
| *Otikkan* | .. | Chanter of Vedas |
| *Puja* | .. | Worship |
| *Prakara* | .. | The pathway around the sanctum for circumambulation |
| *Prasadam* | .. | Literally, divine grace; food or flowers offered to the deity distributed to the devotees |
| *Pratishta* | .. | Installation |
| *Panchagavya* | .. | A mixture of cow's milk, curd, ghee, urine and dung |
| *Pallivetta* | .. | Hunting expedition of the Lord |
| *Prema* | .. | Love, devotion |
| *Satram* | .. | Dormitory for pilgrims |
| *Swargarohanam* | .. | Ascent to celestial regions |
| *Satturic* | .. | One of the three *Gunas*, this being the most virtuous |
| *Sastra* | .. | Sacred lore, science |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Sloka* | .. | Couplet or Quatrain in Sanskrit |
| *Srikoil* | .. | Sanctum Sanctorum |
| *Satyaloka* | .. | Celestial region where Brahma resides |
| *Siveli* | .. | Procession of the Deity |
| *Sopanam* | .. | Steps leading to the Sanctum |
| *Salagrama* | .. | Sacred stone found in the river bed of the Gandak in Nepal and worshipped by Vaishnavas |
| *Sraddha* | .. | Death Anniversary |
| *Stotras* | .. | Praises |
| *Utsavam* | .. | Temple Festival |
| *Utsava Vigraha* | .. | Processional deity |
| *Ushah* | .. | Early morning |
| *Uchcha* | .. | Noon |
| *Udayastamana* | .. | From Sunrise to Sunset |
| *Uttupura* | .. | Dining Hall |
| *Utsavabali* | .. | Oblations made to altars during festivals |
| *Uri* | .. | A suspended net holding curdpots and other utensils |
| *Viswaroopa* | .. | Cosmic form |
| *Vaikuntha* | .. | Celestial abode of Mahavishnu |
| *Vazhivadu* | .. | Offerings to the deity |
| *Vilakkumatam* | .. | Wooden framework with rows of lamps surrounding the cloister |
| *Vatilmatam* | .. | Raised platforms for feeding devotees |
| *Varna* | .. | Caste |
| *Vilakku* | .. | Festival of lights, usually including Elephant procession |
| *Vrata* | .. | Penance ; observation of austerities |

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Shri Vaidyanathan has made a special study of Guruvayur, in Central Kerala, which is emerging as one of the foremost pilgrim centres of India.

To hundreds of thousands of devotees, Guruvayurappan or the Lord of Guruvayur, is a living deity who answers their prayers. Guruvayurappan is Sri Krishna, the divine cowherd who played his flute in Gokulam and Vrindavana and enchanted the whole world with his music. It is not only the gopis or milkmaids who yearn for oneness with him, but all men and women who wish to be liberated from *Samsara*.

For the first time in English, the author gives a comprehensive account of the temple of Guruvayur, its origin, its architecture, the legends told about it, the elaborate system of daily rites, the pageantry of festivals conducted round the year, a discourse on Narayaniyam, the gospel of Guruvayur and of course, several miracles attributed to the Grace of Sri Guruvayurappan.